On_the_Heights_of_Despair_-_Emil_M_Cioran

On the Heights of Despair

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by

E. M. Cioran

Translated and with an Introduction by

Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston

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- Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston -

Introduction:

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Imagining Cioran

Imagining the author is part of any reading experience. For the translator, even more than for the ordinary reader, the author, or that fiction named Author, is a personal obsession. Like Jacob who wrestled a mysterious being all night long, the translator struggles silently with the author until he blesses him or lets him go. Like Jacob, he wants to know his opponent, to see him face to face, is haunted physically and spiritually by the author's face, his name, his strength, his style. So I struggled with Cioran, and for a long time I imagined him like a spirit conjured up from the lines of his text as from a witch's brew: a leonine head, Zarathustra's voice, dramatic poses alternating between those of a biblical prophet and a Western dandy. Above all, I saw him as frightfully young and precocious, with an uncanny affinity for suffering and a diabolical propensity for self-torture, an enfant terrible full of somber and cruel vitality, dangerously playing at philosophy, toying with poisonous and lethal thoughts.

But my Cioran has a historical dimension still recoverable from a not-too-distant past. He is a young intellectual from Romania's politically troubled interwar period. Along with Eugene Ionesco, the absurdist playwright and member of the Académic française, and Mircea Eliade, the philosopher and historian of religions, he participated in Romania's cultural Renaissance during the 1930s. He belonged to Romania's "Young Generation," her "angry young men," who, in Matei Calinescu's words, represented "a generation whose creed was based on the primacy of youth over old age - youth being equated with spiritual fervor, authenticity, creativity, idealism, while old age symbolized routine, inertia, political corruption and petty materialism." As Calinescu points out, 1934, the year when On the Heights of Despair was first published, was one of the high points of the 1930s in Romania. Eliade published five books, among them a study in religious anthropology which contains the main ideas of The Forge and the Crucible (1962), and Ionesco published his only major Romanian book, a volume of deconstructive literary criticism titled No.

Though younger than either Eliade or Ionesco, Cioran was no less interesting. His intense personality invited fictionalizing early in his life. Calinescu, for example, recognizes an early portrait of the young Cioran in the character of ^tefan Prlea (the name suggests conflagration) from Mihail Sebastian's 1934 novel, For Two Thousand Years, where he is the author of an essay provocatively titled, "Invocation for an Invasion of the Barbarians as Soon as Possible." He embodies "the nihilistic-apocalyptic sensibilities of the young generation of Romanian intellectuals."

It was hard for me to reconcile my fictional Cioran with his historical origins. The voice which in On the Heights of Despair vehemently denounces Christianity, and the man who wrote the startling essay "The Flight from the Cross," clash with the image of the real-life Cioran, son of a Romanian Orthodox priest. He was born in the Transylvanian mountain village of R_inari, famous in Romania not only for its natural beauty but also as the home and the final resting place of other cultural figures of national renown, the poet Octavian Goga and the enlightened Orthodox bishop-scholar of Transylvania, Andrei ^aguna. As a young teenager, I once passed through Cioran's village. The idyllic village, with its stone-paved, uneven streets and ancient peasant houses, was like a place out of time, an enchanted, mythical site. A mysterious richness hung about it, entrancing, heavy, and luminous like the golden glow of the silent summer afternoon I spent in its gardens and orchards. And I know now that on my way to the cemetery to visit Bishop ^aguna's tomb I passed Cioran's family house. It was my first unwitting encounter with him, who has been for the last few years my private obsessive fiction, and to whom, in my linguistic struggle, I have clung like Jacob to his angel.

I am no Jacob, and Cioran is no angel, except perhaps a sly one of the devil's party. But for as long as I have known of his existence, he has been hard to grab hold of and impossible to pin down. When I was a student in Romania in the 1960s and 1970s, he was a mysterious, almost mythological, presence. One would hear that such a person existed, but it was impossible to read him. His French books were neither sold nor published in translation, and his Romanian books had disappeared without a trace, the rarest of rare books. Although he had departed his homeland some ten years before the war and the Communist takeover, he was as invisible as

the most unspeakable, or unnameable, of nonpersons. When I came to America in the late 1970s, I found that he was well known in elite intellectual circles, though he remained as elusive and mysterious as ever. His Romanian books are still literally rare, available only from special collections. The present book is the first translation of Cioran from his native language into English. At last, I have got hold of him, and for at least the space of one translation - that most provisional of arts - I have pinned him down for others to see and read. Granted, he is a specialized taste, too sharp and bitter for many palates and, paradoxically, too lyrical and funny for some others. Yet Sartre has always had a large following in English, and Cioran is in my estimation a better pure writer than Sartre or any of the postwar French existentialists. His stylistic incisiveness has led some French critics to put him in the same class as Paul Valéry, an ultimate accolade of linguistic purity. But the shocking, bracing verve of his existential despair - and good humor - admits his philosophical prose to the company of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

As I tried to imagine my Cioran, I kept replaying in my mind that day of long ago when I first brushed by his invisible presence, and I wondered how I could relate my “nihilistic-apoca- lyptic” Cioran to the details I still remembered so well: the mountain air shimmering with hues of gold and green and blue, the still, heavy, yet happy torpor of a slumbering summer day in a remote village where the only sign of activity was the buzz of lazy drones on leaves of grass. And was it my Cioran that I had almost touched, or just a ghost he had long left behind, whose name was only secretively whispered in Romania for the past twenty-five years? Instead of an answer to my puzzlement, I found in Cioran’s own writing a confirmation of the irredeemable incompatibility I sensed between the place and the man. In The Temptation to Exist (1956), he writes about his origins:

The paradox of being … [a Romanian] is a torrent one must know how to exploit…. Hating my people, my country, its timeless peasants enamoured of their own torpor and almost bursting with hebetude, I blushed to be descended from them…. Unable to shove them aside, or to animate them, I came to the point of dreaming of an extermination.

In a lighter vein, when I first visited him last summer, he also recalled, as a confirmation of this incompatibility between himself and his origins, a humorous family anecdote concerning the scandal stirred up in his remote native region by his first nihilistic book, On the Heights of Despair. His father, a priest, and his mother, head of the Christian Women's League, kept a very low profile, and weathered the storm by hiding in the house with the lights off and going to bed very early for weeks on end.

A reader of Cioran's entire oeuvre easily gets caught up in the game of making and unmaking authorial fictions, for the real-life Cioran has two lives, two identities, two authorial voices. In 1937 he won a student fellowship and left Romania for Paris, never to return. He wrote only in French thereafter. As I have already said, Cioran is little known in Romania outside intellectual circles, which have kept his name alive underground. While his fame grew steadily in the West from the moment his first French book, Précis de décomposition, was published in 1949, a quarter-century of Romania's Communist cultural policies managed to erase all the traces he had left behind in his native country, where he published several works. The recent Romanian revolution has allowed a Cioran revival, toward which Cioran himself has mixed feelings. Modest and unassuming, though winner of the Prix Combat and acclaimed as "the greatest French writer to honor our language since the death of Paul Valéry" (St. John Perse) and "the most distinguished figure in the tradition of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein" (Susan Sontag), Cioran has always shunned fame. He regards it as an ambiguous blessing and prefers anonymity as a guarantor of freedom, even when the freedom he seems to aspire to most is that of walking undisturbed in the Luxembourg gardens.

The Romanian Cioran of the 1930s is different from but related to the French - and much better known - Cioran of the later decades. By reading the younger Romanian Cioran, we discover, as another of his translators put it, "what he has kept and what he has discarded, the old man of his youth and the new man he became after his encounter with the French language." The themes of Cioran's work are the themes of modern and post-modern Western civilization: despair and decay, absurdity and alienation, futility

and the irrationality of existence, the need for total lucidity and self-awareness, and consciousness as agony. On the Heights of Despair, Cioran's first published work, foreshadows the main themes of his later philosophical essays and is highly significant as the original source-spring of this modern philosophical writer's thought.

The French Cioran is a Nietzsche distilled through Chamfort, a "Job tamed at the school of the moralists," an elegant and ironic stylist who has curbed the fiery lyricism of his youth with moral aphorisms, because he knows that "a moralist's first duty is to depoetize his prose" (Le mauvais demiurge, 135). My Cioran, by contrast, at the time he was writing On the Heights of Despair in 1934, is only twenty-two years old, a Nietzsche still complete with his "Zarathustra, his poses, his mystical clown's tricks, a whole circus of the heights" (Syllogismes de I'amertume, 44). His display of hysteria, his confession of failure, his despair and lucid suffering also echo Dostoyevsky's man from underground, revealing Cioran as a young iconoclast from Europe's eastern margins, spitefully spouting fire and brimstone from his Balkan hole-in-the-ground, a visionary of apocalypse, a "lover of paroxysms," a theoretician of despair, an untamed Job, similar to the one he portrayed in his last Romanian book, Tears and Saints: "Job, [is] cosmic lamentations and weeping willows … open wounds of nature and of the soul … and a human heart, God's open wound."

The existence of a real-life author complicates the game of authorial fiction-making. As I fashioned my Cioran, I longed to meet the real-life Cioran because, like Jacob, I wanted his blessing but also because I felt that he would not be complete until I met him in flesh and blood. I knew that the real-life eighty-year old Cioran would be very different from my youthful authorial fiction, but I looked forward to the clash of images as something essential and fulfilling, in line with all the contradictions impishly cultivated in Cioran's work. Whenever I imagined my Cioran, I hoped that the real-life Cioran, though close to eighty, would be a young old man. I was not disappointed.

In his modest Paris apartment, imaginatively improvised out of the attic of an old building on the Left Bank, where until recently there was no elevator, he emerged from an enormous clutter of towering books, and led me

through a narrow passage with a low ceiling and an uneven floor to an unexpectedly sunny room with a cheerful garden suspended from its terrace. Cioran looked frail, but misleadingly so, as I discovered when he told me that he preferred to ignore the new elevators in his building, or when, stepping out briskly, he took me on his favorite walk through the Luxembourg gardens. When he talked, his clear green eyes flashed from under thick eyebrows, their penetrating glare transfixing me to the chair, while his jaw pushed forward with youthful determination, and the old man was miraculously transformed into the young man I knew, my Cioran. But the fascinating contradiction remained, for the young man spoke like an old man, and when I asked what he was writing, he answered that he no longer wrote, because "I don't want to slander the universe anymore; I've done it long enough, don't you think so?" Yes, this seemed to be the "new" Cioran, professing that he is through with writing and that he has exhausted calumny, so different from my young Cioran whose first book was brimming over with blasphemy. And yet, hearing him talk, humorously and vivaciously - another contradiction coming from a "writer of gloomy aphorisms" - I could not help feeling that I may not have been dealing with the real-life Cioran as much as with another fiction, a new persona, and that he will soon take us by surprise yet another time, for he is a master of dramatic effects who has been described as both "candid and diabolical" by the Italian writer Pietro Citati and as "the last dandy" by the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater.

If fictionalizing the author is part of any reading experience, an exercise of the imagination which varies in degrees of importance depending on the book, it becomes a central issue in reading On the Heights of Despair, where the author deliberately invents a fictional self through rhetorical artifices and theatrical gestures, in order to save his real self. Written in a moment of crisis, when he was helplessly and desperately insomniac, the book is a substitute for suicide and represents its cure. Its title makes a direct allusion to suicide notices placed in contemporary Romanian newspapers of the period which invariably opened with the same formula: "On the heights of despair, young so-and-so took his life…." A rather pompous sounding phrase, "on the heights of despair" thus came to be recognized as a sort of generic rationale for all suicides. Using the cliche ironically, Cioran casts himself in the role of what I would call "the young

barbarian" or the "beast" of the Apocalypse, who, with a blood and tear-stained face, uttering a savage cry of revolt and despair from the heart of his semi-Oriental Balkans, hangs over the abyss of existential nausea. By casting himself in this character, Cioran commits suicide metaphorically while managing to survive the call of death by releasing through his invented character the surplus of lyrical energy surging in him: "The terrifying experience and obsession of death, when preserved in consciousness, becomes ruinous. If you talk about death, you save part of yourself. But at the same time, something of your real self dies, because objectified meanings lose the actuality they have in consciousness."

The impulse to write in order to free himself of his obsessions has always motivated Cioran's work. As he put it in a recent interview with Savater, "Writing is for me a form of therapy, nothing more." Like the young Goethe of the Sturm und Drang period, who invented the suicidal Werther in order to survive a personal crisis, Cioran also creates a character out of his anguished self. But unlike Goethe, for whom Werther was a private demon he managed to exorcise "so well that he did not suffer at all," a mere accident in a career so "limpid," and devoid of "sublime or sordid secrets" that it is "discouraging," Cioran, who confesses he has "no organ of feeling for Goethe" (Syllogismes de I'amertume, 22), sees his destiny as inextricably linked to the sufferer who first comes to life in On the Heights of Despair:

I hate wise men because they are lazy, cowardly and prudent…. So much more complex is the man who suffers from limitless anxiety. The wise man's life is empty and sterile, for it is free from contradiction and despair. An existence full of irreconcilable contradictions is so much richer and creative.

On the Heights of Despair is a Romantic crisis poem in prose whose main topic is the self at grips with itself, God, and the universe. The self's personal obsessions, predilections, and manias become clear from a glance at some of the chapter titles: "The Passion for the Absurd," "The Blessings

of Insomnia," "Weariness and Agony," "The Premonition of Madness," "On Death," "On Sadness," "Nothing Is Important," "Total Dissatisfaction," "The Monopoly of Suffering," "Not to Be a Man Anymore," "Man, the Insomniac Animal," "Degradation through Work," "The Flight from the Cross," "Absolute Lyricism," "Nonsense."

Though not poetry, On the Heights of Despair is a very lyrical work, a "song of myself" in which the confessional mood becomes a philosophical meditation and where the great philosophical topics like death, God, infinity, time, eternity, history, truth, good, and evil are no longer abstract but acquire an organic reality, a living meaning:

There are experiences and obsessions with which one cannot live. Isn't it then salvation to confess them? … To be lyrical means you cannot stay closed up inside yourself. The need to externalize is the more intense, the more the lyricism is interiorized, profound, and concentrated…. The deepest subjective experiences are also the most universal, because through them one reaches the original source of life.

The origin of this song, part cry from the heart, part reflective meditation, lies in suffering from a real organic affliction - insomnia - and from the crisis of despair that it induced. When Cioran writes that "the lyricism of suffering is a song of the blood, the flesh, and the nerves," he gives us a basic definition of his writing, in this book as well as in subsequent works (despite their more subdued lyrical effusions): a writing in which tears turn into thoughts. Writing and philosophizing are for Cioran organically related to suffering. A running theme throughout On the Heights of Despair is that sickness and suffering have "lyrical virtues" which alone lead to "metaphysical revelations." "To suffer is to generate knowledge," he will write later in Le mauvais demiurge. His life and his work are the metamorphosis of tears: "They ask you for facts, proofs, works, and all you can show them are transformed tears" (Le mauvais demiurge, 131).

The lyrical state being “beyond forms and systems,” Cioran’s writing is grotesque, formless. The chapters of his book are like a chart of his lyrical fevers, monitoring the rise and fall of his intense inner life, faithfully tracing the course of his “dispersion of subjectivity.” They are unequal both in length and in tone. Long meditations on philosophical themes are interspersed with brief lyrical outbursts, repetitive to the point of being obsessive, often comical and humorous even though the prevalent mood is one of despair. At other times, especially in the second half of the book, they tend increasingly toward aphorism and paradox, the trademark of his later writing. The style of the book, by turns lyrical and ironical, poetical and paradoxical, rejects the technique of dry philosophical argument in favor of suggestive and vivid imagery, and reveals the intellectual and spiritual agony of the philosopher’s mind in playful yet gripping ways, anticipating the later Cioran’s unique combination of elegant style and profoundly felt thought.

This kind of “grotesque” writing self-consciously sets itself against a whole tradition of “civilized” writing and, with its emphasis on death, suffering, and chaos, situates itself outside the domain of the aesthetic: “Compared to the refined culture of forms and frames, which mask everything, the lyrical mode is utterly barbarian in its expression. Its value resides precisely in its savage quality: it is only blood, sincerity, and fire.” The young barbarian’s horror of the refinements of sclerotic cultures is a theme that will reappear in Cioran’s portrayal of the French in The Temptation to Exist. But another, more fundamental aspect of Cioran’s philosophy is present here in his profession of faith in the resources of “absolute lyricism,” namely, his lucidity as a thinker who discovers and mercilessly exposes the hollowness of all philosophical systems.

On the Heights of Despair is a drama enacted between the suffering problematic man, that is, the organic and lyrical thinker who is Cioran’s sufferer, and his arch enemy, the philosopher or the sage, the abstract man, a distinction reminiscent of Nietzsche’s Dionysian and Socratic man. Thus Cioran writes that “Out of the shadow of the abstract man, who thinks for the pleasure of thinking, emerges the organic man, who thinks because of a vital imbalance, and who is beyond science and art.” The organic or lyrical thinker is the man who turns his tears into thoughts and whose thoughts are

obsessions. Here is his confession: “I like thought which preserves a whiff of flesh and blood, and I prefer a thousand times an idea rising from sexual tension or nervous depression to an empty abstraction.” In the clutches of utter despair, that state of heightened lucidity which is the “negative equivalent of ecstasy,” the lyrical thinker contemptuously rejects the intellectual optimism of the abstract man:

Despair is the state in which anxiety and restlessness are immanent to existence. Nobody in despair suffers from “problems,” but from his own inner torment and fire. It’s a pity that nothing can be solved in this world. Yet there never was and there never will be anyone who would commit suicide for this reason. So much for the power that intellectual anxiety has over the total anxiety of our being! That is why I prefer the dramatic life, consumed by inner fires and tortured by destiny, to the intellectual, caught up in abstractions which do not engage the essence of our subjectivity. I despise the absence of risks, madness, and passion in abstract thinking. How fertile live, passionate thinking is! Lyricism feeds it like blood pumped into the heart!

Nietzsche, in The Birth of Tragedy, criticizes the optimism or “Greek cheerfulness” that goes with the Platonic ideal of the “dying Socrates, as the human being whom knowledge and reason have liberated from the fear of death.” Those who pursue this ideal ultimately discover that “logic coils up at the boundaries [of science] and finally bites its own tail,” whereupon “a new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight. ” Similarly, Cioran attacks “those who try to eliminate the fear of death through artificial reasoning … because it is absolutely impossible to cancel an organic fear by way of abstract constructs.” For Cioran, not only is the philosopher’s attempt to found a system an impossible endeavor; it is also a sterile one, since the source of genuine human creativity lies precisely in suffering, blood, tears, and the agony of death. “All important things bear the sign of death:”

Haven’t people learned yet that the time of superficial intellectual games is over, that agony is infinitely more important than syllogism, that a cry of despair is more revealing than the most subtle thought, and that tears always have deeper roots than smiles?

In this spirit, an attitude which characterizes his later works as well (Valéry face à ses idoles), Cioran rejects philosophical systems which only manage to reduce the profound to the expressible:

Those who write under the spell of inspiration, for whom thought is an expression of their organic nervous disposition, do not concern themselves with unity and systems. Such concerns, contradictions, and facile paradoxes indicate an impoverished and insipid personal life. Only great and dangerous contradictions betoken a rich spiritual life because only they constitute a mode of realization for life’s abundant inner flow.

Savater calls Cioran’s philosophical discourse “antipedagogical.” It tackles major philosophical themes but deliberately resists taking shape as an informative and constructive discourse. It does not aspire to produce anything “new” on the subject, thus renouncing all false pretensions to originality. “It never recommends anything except the horrible and the impossible and even that only ironically.” Cioran never tires of saying that he believes in nothing. His “destructive” discourse, going against the grain of traditional philosophical practice, unremittingly seeks to expose the contradictions inherent in any philosophical system and cultivates with relish all contraries, conferring upon them equal value and equally little significance:

Everything is possible, and yet nothing is. All is permitted, and yet again, nothing. No matter which way we go, it is no better than any other…. There

is an explanation for everything, and yet there is none. Everything is both real and unreal, normal and absurd, splendid and insipid. There is nothing worth more than something else, nor any idea better than another…. All gain is a loss, and all loss is a gain. Why always expect a definite stance, clear ideas, meaningful words? I feel as if I should spout fire in response to all the questions which were ever put, or not put, to me.

In Syllogismes de I'amertume, Cioran recalls in a short anecdote how, as a young and ambitious philosophy student, he wanted to write a thesis on an extremely original topic and chose, to his professor's dismay, a "general theory of tears." It may be that On the Heights of Despair was written in lieu of this proposed "theory of tears." It received the prize of the King Carol II Foundation for Literature and Art. My young Cioran is a philosopher who could not or would not philosophize abstractly and systematically and who, in a dramatic turnabout of which On the Heights of Despair is the painstaking record, became a poet. As a poet, he continued to philosophize - poetically.

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Note on the Text

This translation aims at capturing the lyrical, whimsical spirit of Cioran’s original Romanian, not a literal, word-for-word accuracy. Principally, this has meant a trimming of Cioran’s youthful prose, mainly those passages that sound florid or redundant in English. All such cuts, changes, and revisions were either made by or approved by the author, who has also cut additional passages and sections that were conceptually repetitive.

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On Being Lyrical

Why can’t we stay closed up inside ourselves? Why do we chase after expression and form, trying to deliver ourselves of our precious contents or “meanings,” desperately attempting to organize what is after all a rebellious and chaotic process? Wouldn’t it be more creative simply to surrender to our inner fluidity without any intention of objectifying it, intimately and voluptuously soaking in our own inner turmoil and struggle? Then we would feel with much richer intensity the whole inner growth of spiritual experience. All kinds of insights would blend and flourish in a fertile effervescence. A sensation of actuality and spiritual content would be born, like the rise of a wave or a musical phrase. To be full of one’s self, not in the sense of pride, but of enrichment, to be tormented by a sense of inner infinity, means to live so intensely that you feel you are about to die of life. Such a feeling is so rare and strange that we would live it out with shouts. I feel I could die of life, and I ask myself if it makes any sense to look for an explanation. When your entire spiritual past vibrates inside you with a supreme tension, when a sense of total presence resurrects buried experiences and you lose your normal rhythm, then, from the heights of life, you are caught by death without the fear which normally accompanies it. It is a feeling similar to that experienced by lovers on the heights of happiness, when they have a passing but intense intimation of death or when a Premonition of betrayal haunts their budding love.

Only a few can endure such experiences to the end. There is always a serious danger in repressing something which requires objectification, in locking up explosive energy, because there comes a moment when one cannot restrain such overwhelming power. And then the fall is from too much plenitude. There are experiences and obsessions one cannot live with. Salvation lies in confessing them. The terrifying experience of death, when preserved in consciousness, becomes ruinous. If you talk about death, you save part of your self. But at the same time, something of your real self dies, because objectified meanings lose the actuality they have in consciousness. This is why lyricism represents a dispersion of subjectivity; it is a certain quantity of an individual’s spiritual effervescence which

cannot be contained and needs constant expression. To be lyrical means you cannot stay closed up inside yourself. The need to externalize is the more intense, the more the lyricism is interiorized, profound, and concentrated. Why is the suffering or loving man lyrical? Because such states, although different in nature and orientation, spring up from the deepest and most intimate part of our being, from the substantial center of subjectivity, as from a radiation zone. One becomes lyrical when one's life beats to an essential rhythm and the experience is so intense that it synthesizes the entire meaning of one's personality. What is unique and specific in us is then realized in a form so expressive that the individual rises onto a universal plane. The deepest subjective experiences are also the most universal, because through them one reaches the original source of life. True interiorization leads to a universality inaccessible to those who remain on the periphery. The vulgar interpretation of universality calls it a phenomenon of quantitative expansion rather than a qualitatively rich containment. Such an interpretation sees lyricism as a peripheral and inferior phenomenon, the product of spiritual inconsistency, failing to notice that the lyrical resources of subjectivity show remarkable freshness and depth. There are people who become lyrical only at crucial moments in their life; some only in the throes of death, when their entire past suddenly appears before them and hits them with the force of a waterfall. Many become lyrical after some decisively critical experience, when the turmoil of their inner being reaches paroxysm. Thus people who are normally inclined toward objectivity and impersonality, strangers both to themselves and to reality, once they become prisoners of love, experience feelings which actualize all their personal resources. The fact that almost everybody writes poetry when in love proves that the resources of conceptual thinking are too poor to express their inner infinity; inner lyricism finds adequate objectification only through fluid, irrational material. The experience of suffering is a similar case. You never suspected what lay hidden in yourself and in the world, you were living contentedly at the periphery of things, when suddenly those feelings of suffering which are second only to death itself take hold of you and transport you into a region of infinite complexity, where your subjectivity tosses about in a maelstrom. To be lyrical from suffering means to achieve that inner purification in which wounds cease to be mere outer manifestations without deep complications and begin to participate in the essence of your being. The lyricism of suffering is a song

of the blood, the flesh, and the nerves. True suffering begins in illness. Almost all illnesses have lyrical virtues. Only those who vegetate in a scandalous insensitivity remain impersonal when ill, and thus miss that deepening of the personality brought about by illness. One does not become lyrical except after a total organic affliction. Accidental lyricism has its source in external factors; once they have disappeared, their inner correspondent also disappears. There is no authentic lyricism without a grain of interior madness. It is significant that the beginnings of all mental psychoses are marked by a lyrical phase during which all the usual barriers and limits disappear, giving way to an inner drunkenness of the most fertile, creative kind. This explains the poetic productivity characteristic of the first phases of psychoses. Consequently, madness could be seen as a sort of paroxysm of lyricism. For this reason, we should rather write in praise of lyricism than in praise of folly. The lyrical state is a state beyond forms and systems. A sudden fluidity melts all the elements of our inner life in one fell swoop, and creates a full and intense rhythm, an ideal convergence. Compared to the refined culture of sclerotic forms and frames, which mask everything, the lyrical mode is utterly barbarian in its expression. Its value resides precisely in its savage quality: it is only blood, sincerity, and fire.

How Distant Everything Is!

I don’t understand why we must do things in this world, why we must have friends and aspirations, hopes and dreams. Wouldn’t it be better to retreat to a faraway corner of the world, where all its noise and complications would be heard no more? Then we could renounce culture and ambitions; we would lose everything and gain nothing; for what is there to be gained from this world? There are people to whom gain is unimportant, who are hopelessly unhappy and lonely. We are so closed to one another! And yet, were we to be totally open to each other, reading into the depths of our souls, how much of our destiny would we see? We are so lonely in life that we must ask ourselves if the loneliness of dying is not a symbol of our human existence. Can there be any consolation at the last moment? This willingness to live and die in society is a mark of great deficiency. It is a

thousand times preferable to die somewhere alone and abandoned so that you can die without melodramatic posturing, unseen by anyone. I despise people who on their deathbed master themselves and adopt a pose in order to impress. Tears do not burn except in solitude. Those who ask to be surrounded by friends when they die do so out of fear and inability to live their final moments alone. They want to forget death at the moment of death. They lack infinite heroism. Why don't they lock their door and suffer those maddening sensations with a lucidity and a fear beyond all limits?

We are so isolated form everything! But isn't everything equally inaccessible to us? The deepest and most organic death is death in solitude, when even light becomes a principle of death. In such moments you will be severed from life, from love, smiles, friends and even from death. And you will ask yourself if there is anything besides the nothingness of the world and your own nothingness.

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On Not Wanting to Live

There are experiences which one cannot survive, after which one feels that there is no meaning left in anything. Once you have reached the limits of life, having lived to extremity all that is offered at those dangerous borders, the everyday gesture and the usual aspiration lose their seductive charm. If you go on living, you do so only through your capacity for objectification, your ability to free yourself, in writing, from the infinite strain. Creativity is a temporary salvation from the claws of death.

I feel I must burst because of all that life offers me and because of the prospect of death. I feel that I am dying of solitude, of love, of despair, of hatred, of all that this world offers me. With every experience I expand like a balloon blown up beyond its capacity. The most terrifying intensification bursts into nothingness. You grow inside, you dilate madly until there are no boundaries left, you reach the edge of light, where light is stolen by night, and from that plenitude as in a savage whirlwind you are thrown straight into nothingness. Life breeds both plenitude and void, exuberance and depression. What are we when confronted with the interior vortex which swallows us into absurdity? I feel my life cracking within me from too much intensity, too much disequilibrium. It is like an explosion which cannot be contained, which throws you up in the air along with everything else. At the edge of life you feel that you are no longer master of the life within you, that subjectivity is an illusion, and that uncontrollable forces are seething inside you, evolving with no relation to a personal center or a definite, individual rhythm. At the edge of life everything is an occasion for death. You die because of all there is and all there is not. Every experience is in this case a leap into nothingness. When you have lived everything life has offered you to a paroxysm of supreme intensity, you have reached the stage at which you can no longer experience anything, because there is nothing left. Even if you have not exhausted all the possibilities of these experiences, it is enough to have lived the principal ones to their limit. And when you feel that you are dying of loneliness, despair, or love, all that you have not experienced joins in this endlessly sorrowful procession.

The feeling that you cannot survive such whirlwinds also arises from a consummation on a purely inner plane. The flames of life burn in a closed oven from which the heat cannot escape. Those who live on an external plane are saved from the outset: but do they have anything to save when they are not aware of any danger? The paroxysm of interior experience leads you to regions where danger is absolute, because life which self-consciously actualizes its roots in experience can only negate itself. Life is too limited and too fragmentary to endure great tensions. Did not all the mystics feel that they could not live after their great ecstasies? What could they expect from this world, those who sense, beyond the normal limits, life, loneliness, despair, and death?

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The Passion for the Absurd

There are no arguments. Can anyone who has reached the limit bother with arguments, causes, effects, moral considerations, and so forth? Of course not. For such a person there are only unmotivated motives for living. On the heights of despair, the passion for the absurd is the only thing that can still throw a demonic light on chaos. When all the current reasons - moral, esthetic, religious, social, and so on - no longer guide one's life, how can one sustain life without succumbing to nothingness? Only by a connection with the absurd, by love of absolute uselessness, loving something which does not have substance but which simulates an illusion of life.

I live because the mountains do not laugh and the worms do not sing. The passion for the absurd can grow only in a man who has exhausted everything, yet is still capable of undergoing awesome transfigurations. For one who has lost everything there is nothing left in life except the passion of the absurd. What else in life could still move such a person? What seductions? Some say: self-sacrifice for humanity, the public good, the cult of the beautiful, and so forth. I like only those people who have done away with all that - even for a short time. Only they have lived in an absolute manner. Only they have the right to speak about life. You can recover love or serenity. But you recover it through heroism, not ignorance. An existence which does not hide a great madness has no value. How is it different from the existence of a stone, a piece of wood, or something rotten? And yet I tell you: you must hide a great madness in order to want to become stone, wood, or rot. Only when you have tasted all the poisoning sweetness of the absurd are you fully purified, because only then will you have pushed negation to its final expression. And are not all final expressions absurd?

there are people who are destined to taste only the poison in things, for whom any surprise is a painful surprise and any experience a new occasion for torture. If someone were to say to me that such suffering has subjective reasons, related to the individual's particular makeup, I would then ask; Is there an objective criterion for evaluating suffering? Who can say with precision that my neighbor suffers more than I do or that Jesus suffered

more than all of us? There is no objective standard because suffering cannot be measured according to the external stimulation or local irritation of the organism, but only as it is felt and reflected in consciousness. Alas, from this point of view, any hierarchy is out of the question. Each person remains with his own suffering, which he believes absolute and unlimited. How much would we diminish our own personal suffering if we were to compare it to all the world's sufferings until now, to the most horrifying agonies and the most complicated tortures, the most cruel deaths and the most painful betrayals, all the lepers, all those burned alive or starved to death? Nobody is comforted in his sufferings by the thought that we are all mortals, nor does anybody who suffers really find comfort in the past or present suffering of others. Because in this organically insufficient and fragmentary world, the individual is set to live fully, wishing to make of his own existence an absolute. Each subjective existence is absolute to itself. For this reason each man lives as if he were the center of the universe or the center of history. Then how could his suffering fail to be absolute? I cannot understand another's suffering in order to diminish my own. Comparisons in such cases are irrelevant, because suffering is an interior state, in which nothing external can help.

But there is a great advantage in the loneliness of suffering. What would happen if a man's face could adequately express his suffering, if his entire inner agony were objectified in his facial expression? Could we still communicate? Wouldn't we then cover our faces with our hands while talking? Life would really be impossible if the infinitude of feelings we harbor within ourselves were fully expressed in the lines of our faces.

Nobody would dare look at himself in the mirror, because a grotesque, tragic image would mix in the contours of his face with stains and traces of blood, wounds which cannot be healed, and unstoppable streams of tears. I would experience a kind of voluptuous awe if I could see a volcano of blood, eruptions as red as fire and as burning as despair, burst into the midst of the comfortable and superficial harmony of everyday life, or if I could see all our hidden wounds open, making of us a bloody eruption forever. Only then would we truly understand and appreciate the advantage of loneliness, which silences our suffering and makes it inaccessible. The venom drawn out from suffering would be enough to poison the whole

world in a bloody eruption, bursting out of the volcano of our being. There is so much venom, so much poison, in suffering!

True solitude is the feeling of being absolutely isolated between the earth and the sky. Nothing should detract attention from these phenomena of absolute isolation: a fearfully lucid intuition will reveal the entire drama of man's finite nature facing the infinite nothingness of the world. Solitary walks - extremely fertile and dangerous at the same time, for the inner life - must take place in such a way that nothing will obscure the solitary's meditation on man's isolation in the world. Solitary walks are propitious to an intense process of interiorization especially in the evening, when none of the usual seductions can steal one's interest. Then revelations about the world spring from the deepest corner of the spirit, from the place where it has detached itself from life, from the wound of life. To achieve spirituality, one must be very lonely. So much death-in-life and so many inner conflagrations! Loneliness negates so much of life that the spirit's blooming in vital dislocations becomes almost insufferable. Isn't it significant that those who have too much spirit, who know the deep wound inflicted on life at the birth of the spirit, are the ones who rise against it? Healthy, fat people, without the least intuition of what spirit is, who have never suffered the tortures of life and the painful antinomies at the base of existence, are the ones who rise up in defense of the spirit. Those who truly know it either tolerate it with pride or regard it as a calamity. Nobody can really be pleased at the bottom of his heart with spirit, an acquisition so damaging to life. How can one be pleased with life without its charm, naiveté, and spontaneity? The presence of the spirit indicates a want of life, great loneliness, and long suffering. Who dares talk of salvation through the spirit? It is by no means true that life on the immanent plane creates an anxiety from which man escapes through the spirit. On the contrary, it is much more true that through spirit man achieves disequilibrium, anxiety as well as grandeur. What do you expect those who don't know the dangers of life to know of the dangers of the spirit? To argue the case for spirit is a sign of great ignorance, just as to make a case for life is a sign of great disequilibrium. For the normal man, life is an undisputed reality; only the sick man is delighted by life and praises it so that he won't collapse. And what about the man who cannot praise either life or the spirit?

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The World and I

I am: therefore the world is meaningless. What meaning is there in the tragic suffering of a man for whom everything is ultimately nothing and whose only law in this world is agony? If the world tolerates somebody like me, this can only mean that the blots on I the so-called sun of life are so large that in time they will obscure its light. Life's beastliness trampled me under foot and oppressed me, clipped my wings in full flight and stole all my rightful joys. 1 The enthusiastic zeal and mad passion I put into becoming a brilliant individual, the demonic charm I adopted to gain an aura in the future, and the energy I spent on an organic, glamorous, inner rebirth, all proved weaker than the beastly brutality and irrationality of this world, which poured into me all its reserves of negativity and poison. Life is impossible at high temperatures. That's why I have reached the conclusion that anguished people, whose inner dynamism is so intense that it reaches paroxysm, and who cannot accept normal temperatures, are doomed to 1 fall. The destruction of those who live unusual lives is an aspect of life's demonism, but it is also an aspect of its insufficiency, which explains why life is the privilege of mediocre people. Only mediocrities live at life's normal temperature; the others are consumed at temperatures at which life cannot endure, at which they can barely breathe, already one foot beyond life. I cannot contribute anything to this world because I only have one method: agony. You complain that people are mean, vengeful, ungrateful, and hypocritical? I propose the agony method to rid you of all these imperfections. Apply it to every generation and its effects will soon be evident. Maybe in this way I too could become useful to mankind!

Bring every man to the agony of life's last moments by whip, fire, or injections, and through terrible torture he will undergo the great purification afforded by a vision of death. Then free him and let him run in a fright until he falls exhausted. I warrant you that the effect is incomparably greater than any obtained through normal means. If I could, I would drive the entire world to agony to achieve a radical purification of life; I would set a fire burning insidiously at the roots of life, not to destroy them but to give them a new and different sap, a new heat. The fire I would set to the world would

not bring ruin but cosmic transfiguration. In this way life would adjust to higher temperatures and would cease to be an environment propitious to mediocrity. And maybe in this dream, death too would cease to be immanent in life.

(These lines written today, April 8, 1933, when I turn twenty-two. It is strange to think that I am already a specialist in the question of death.)

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Weariness and Agony

Are you familiar with the frightening sensation of melting, the feeling of dissolving into a flowing river, in which the self is annulled by organic liquidization? Everything solid and substantial in you melts away in a wearisome fluidity, and the only thing left is your head. I'm speaking of a precise painful sensation, not a vague and undetermined one. As in a hallucinatory dream, you feel that only your head is left, without foundation and support, without a body. This feeling has nothing to do with that vague and voluptuous weariness by the seaside or in melancholy dreamy musings; it is a weariness which consumes and destroys. No effort, no hope, no illusion can satisfy you any longer. Shocked witless by your own catastrophe, unable to think or to act, caught in cold and heavy darkness, solitary as in moments of profound regret, you have reached the negative limit of life, its absolute temperature, where the last illusions about life freeze. The true meaning of agony, which is not a struggle of pure passion or gratuitous fantasy, but life's hopeless struggle in the claws of death, is revealed in this feeling of great weariness. One cannot separate the thought of agony from that of weariness and death. Agony as struggle? But with whom and for what? The interpretation of agony as an ardor exalted by its own futility, or as a battle whose aim is itself, is absolutely false. In fact, agony means a battle between life and death. Since death is immanent in life, almost all of life is an agony. I call agonic only those dramatic moments in the battle between life and death when the presence of death is experienced consciously and painfully. True agony occurs when you pass into nothingness through death, when a feeling of weariness consumes you irrevocably and death wins. In every true agony there is a triumph of death, even though you may continue to live after those moments of weariness.

There is nothing imaginary in this turmoil. Every agony bears a conclusive stamp. Isn't agony similar to an incurable sickness which torments us intermittently? Agonic moments chart the progress of death in life, revealing a drama in our consciousness caused by the disruption of the balance between life and death. Such moments are not possible except in that sensation of weariness which brings life down to its absolute negative

value. Frequency of agonic moments is an indicator of decomposition and ruin. Death is something disgusting, the only obsession which cannot become voluptuous. Even when you want to die, you do it with an implicit regret for your own desire. I want to die, but I am sorry that I want to die. This is the feeling experienced by those who abandon themselves to nothingness. The most perverse feeling is the feeling of death. Imagine that there are people who cannot sleep because of their perverse obsession with death! How I wish I did not know anything about myself and this world!

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Despair and the Grotesque

Among the many forms of the grotesque, I find the one whose roots are steeped in despair more unusual and complex. The other forms have less intensity. It is important to note that the grotesque is inconceivable without intensity of feeling. And what intensity is deeper and more organic than despair? The grotesque appears only in very negative states, when great anxiety arises from a lack of life; the grotesque is an exaltation in negativity.

There is a mad launch toward negativity in that bestial, agonizing grimace when the shape and lines of the face are contorted into strangely expressive forms, when the look in one's eyes changes with distant light and shadow, and one's thoughts follow the curve of similar distortions. Truly intense and irrevocable despair cannot be objectified except in grotesque expressions, because the grotesque is the absolute negation of serenity, that state of purity, transparence, and lucidity so different from the chaos and nothingness of despair. Have you ever had the brutal and amazing satisfaction of looking at yourself in the mirror after countless sleepless nights? Have you suffered the torment of insomnia, when you count the minutes for nights on end, when you feel alone in this world, when your drama seems to be the most important in history and history ceases to have meaning, ceases to exist? When the most terrifying flames grow in you and your existence appears unique and isolated in a world made only for the consummation of your agony? You must have felt those moments, as countless and infinite as suffering, in order to have a clear picture of the grotesque when you look at yourself in the mirror. It is a picture of total strain, a tense grimace to which is added the demonically seductive pallor of a man who has struggled along horrible, dark precipices. Isn't this grotesque expression of despair similar to a precipice? It has something of the abysmal maelstrom of great depths, the seduction of the all-encompassing infinite to which we bow as we bow to fatality. How good it would be if one could die by throwing oneself into an infinite void! The complexity of the grotesque born out of despair resides in its capacity to indicate an inner infinity and to produce a paroxysm of the highest tension.

How could this intense agony manifest itself in pleasant linear curves and formal purity? The grotesque essentially negates the classic, as well as any idea of style, harmony, and perfection.

It is evident to anyone who understands the multiple forms of inner drama that the grotesque hides secret tragedies, indirectly expressed. Whoever has seen his face grotesquely disfigured can never forget it, because he will always be afraid of himself. Despair is followed by painful anxiety. What else does the grotesque do if it does not actualize fear and anxiety?

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The Premonition of Madness

We generally find it hard to understand that some of us must go mad. But sliding into chaos, where moments of lucidity are like short flashes of lightning, is an inexorable fatality. Inspired pages of absolute lyricism, in which you are the prisoner of a total drunkenness of being, can only be written in a state of such exalted nervous tension that any return to equilibrium is an illusion. One cannot live normally after such efforts. The intimate springs of being can no longer sustain normal evolution, and inner barriers lose all reality. The premonition of madness appears only after such capital experiences. One loses one's sense of security and the normal sensation of the immediate and the concrete, as if one were soaring to heights and suffering from vertigo. A heavy load weighs on the brain, compressing it to an illusion, although the frightening organic reality from which our experiences spring can only be revealed through such sensations. An indefinable terror arises from this oppression, throwing you to the ground or blowing you up in the air. It is not just the suffocating fear of death that obsesses man; it is another terror, occurring rarely but intensely like flashes of lightning, like a sudden disturbance which forever eliminates the hope of future serenity.

It is impossible to pinpoint and define this strange premonition of madness. The truly awful thing in madness is that we sense a total and irrevocable loss of life while we are still living. I continue to eat and drink, but I have lost whatever consciousness I bring to my biological functions. It is only an approximate death. In madness one loses the specific individual traits which single one out in the universe, the personal perspective and a certain orientation of consciousness. In death one loses everything, by a fall into nothingness. That is why the fear of death is peristent and essential, but actually less strange than the fear of madness, in which our semi-presence creates an anxiety more complex than the organic fear of the total nothingness of death. but wouldn't madness be an escape from the misery of life? This question has only a theoretical justification, since, practically speaking, for the anguished man the problem appears in a different light, or, rather, in a different shadow. The premonition of madness is complicated by

the fear of lucidity in madness, the fear of the moments of return and reunion, when the intuition of disaster is so painful that it almost provokes a greater madness. There is no salvation through madness, because no man with a premonition of madness can overcome his fear of possible moments of lucidity. One would welcome chaos if one were not afraid of lights in it.

The specific form of one’s madness is determined by organic and temperamental conditions. Since the majority of madmen are depressive, depressive madness is inevitably more common than pleasant, gay, manic exaltation. Black melancholy is so frequent among madmen that almost all of them have suicidal tendencies, whereas for sane people suicide appears a very problematic solution.

I would like to go mad on one condition, namely, that I would become a happy madman, lively and always in a good mood, without any troubles and obsessions, laughing senselessly from morning to night. Although I long for luminous ecstasies, I wouldn’t ask for any, because I know they are followed by great depressions. I would like instead a shower of warm light to fall from me, transfiguring the entire world, an unecstatic burst of light preserving the calm of luminous eternity. Far from the concentrations of ecstasy, it would be all graceful lightness and smiling warmth. The entire world should float in this dream of light, in this transparent and unreal state of delight. Obstacles and matter, form and limits would cease to exist. Then let me die of light in such a landscape.

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On Death

There are questions which, once approached, either isolate you or kill you outright. Afterward you have nothing more to lose. From then on, your erstwhile “serious” pursuits - your spiritual quest for more varied forms of life, your limitless longing for inaccessible things, your elevated frustration with the limits of empiricism - all become simple manifestations of an excessively exuberant sensibility, lacking the profound seriousness which characterizes the man who has penetrated the realm of dangerous mysteries. I’m not talking here of the spiritual calm and empty solemnity of so-called serious people but of a mad tension that puts every moment of your life on the plane of eternity. This profound seriousness cannot be achieved by confronting purely formal problems, no matter how difficult, because they are generated exclusively by our intelligence, not by the total organic structure of our being. Only the organic and existential thinker is capable of this kind of seriousness, because truth for him is alive, born from inner agony and organic disorder rather than useless speculation. Out of the shadow of the abstract man, who thinks for the pleasure of thinking, emerges the organic man, who thinks because of a vital imbalance, and who is beyond science and art. I like thought which preserves a whiff of flesh and blood, and I prefer a thousand times an idea rising from sexual tension or nervous depression to an empty abstraction. Haven’t people learned yet that the time of superficial intellectual games is over, that agony is infinitely more important than syllogism, that a cry of despair is more revealing than the most subtle thought, and that tears always have deeper roots than smiles? Why don’t we want to acknowledge the exclusive value of live truths, of truths born in us and revealing a reality proper only to us?

Why don’t we want to accept that one can entertain lively meditations on death, the most dangerous issue existing? Death is not something from outside, ontologically different from life, because there is no death independent of life. To step into death does not mean, as commonly believed, especially by Christians, to draw one’s last breath and to pass into a region qualitatively different from life. It means, rather, to discover in the course of life the way toward death and to find in life’s vital signs the

immanent abyss of death. For Christianity and other metaphysical beliefs in immortality, the passing into death is a triumph, an opening toward other regions metaphysically different from life. Contrary to such visions, the true sense of agony seems to me to lie in the revelation of death's immanence in life. But why is the experience of agony so rare? Can it be that our hypothesis is entirely false and that sketching a metaphysics of death is possible only by accepting death's transcendental nature?

Healthy, normal, mediocre people cannot experience either agony or death. They live as if life had a definitive character. It is an integral part of normal people's superficial equilibrium to take life as absolutely independent from death and to objectify death as a reality transcending life. That's why they perceive death as coming from the outside, not as an inner fatality of life itself. One of the greatest delusions of the average man is to forget that life is death's prisoner. Metaphysical revelations begin only when one's superficial equilibrium starts to totter and a painful struggle is substituted for naive spontaneity. The premontion of death is so rare in average people that one can practically say that it does not exist. The fact that the presentiment of death appears only when life is shaken to its foundations proves beyond doubt the immanence of death in life. An insight into these depths shows us how illusory is the belief in life's integrity and how well founded the belief in a metaphysical substratum of demonism.

If death is immanent in life, why does awareness of death make living impossible? The average man is not troubled by this awareness because the process of passing into death happens simply through a diminution of vital intensity. For such a man there is only the agony of the last hour, not the longlasting agony related to the very premise of life. From a grave perspective, every step in life is a step into death and memory is only the sign of nothingness. The average man, deprived of metaphysical understanding, does not have this consciousness of progressive advance into death, though neither he nor anyone else can escape its inexorable destiny. But when consciousness becomes independent of life, the revelation of death becomes so strong that its presence destroys all naiveté, all joyful enthusiasm, and all natural voluptuousness. To have the consciousness of death is something perverse and extremely corrupt. The

naive poetry of life, its seductions and charms, appear empty of content. Equally empty are man's finalizing projects and his theological illusions.

To see how death spreads over this world, how it kills a tree and how it penetrates dreams, how it withers a flower or a civilization, how it gnaws on the individual and on culture like a destructive blight, means to be beyond tears and regrets, beyond system and form. Whoever has not experienced the awful agony of death, rising and spreading like a surge of blood, like the choking grasp of a snake which provokes terrifying hallucinations, does not know the demonic character of life and the state of inner effervescence from which great transfigurations arise. Such a state of black drunkenness is a necessary prerequisite to understanding why one wishes the immediate end of this world. It's not the luminous drunkenness of ecstasy, in which paradisal visions conquer you with their splendor and you rise to a purity that sublimates into immateriality, but a mad, dangerous, ruinous, and tormented black drunkenness, in which death appears with the awful seduction of nightmarish snake eyes. To experience such sensations and images means to be so close to the essence of reality that both life and death shed their illusions and attain within you their most dramatic form. An exalted agony combines life and death in a horrible maelstrom: a beastly satanism borrows tears from voluptuousness. Life as a long agony on the road to death is nothing but another manifestation of life's demoniacal dialectics, in which forms are given birth only to be destroyed. The irrationality of life manifests itself in this overhelming expansion of form and content, in this frenetic impulse to substitute new aspects for old ones, a substitution, however, without qualitative improvement. Happy the man who could abandon himself to this becoming and could absorb all the possibilities offered each moment, ignoring the agonizingly problematic evaluation which discovers in every moment an insurmountable relativity. Naiveté is the only road to salvation. But for those who feel and conceive life as a long agony, the question of salvation is a simple one. There is no salvation on their road.

The revelation of death's immanence in life occurs during illnesses and long depressive states. There are, of course, other ways, but they are accidental and individual, and do not have the same potential for revelation as illness or depression.

If illnesses have a philosophical mission in the world, then it can only be to prove how illusory is the feeling of life's eternity and how fragile its illusion of finality. In illness, death is always already in life. Genuine ailment links us to metaphysical realities which the healthy, average man cannot understand. Young people talk of death as external to life. But when an illness hits them with full power, all the illusions and seductions of youth disappear. In this world, the only genuine agonies are those sprung from illness. All others bear the fatal mark of bookishness. Only those who truly suffer are capable of genuine content and infinite seriousness. The others are born to harmony, love, dance, and gracefulness. And there are many who would gladly give up metaphysical revelations, obtained through despair, agony, and death, in exchange for a naive love or the voluptuous unconsciousness of dance. And there are many who would renounce glory acquired through suffering for an anonymous happy existence.

All illnesses are heroic, but with a heroism of resistance, not of conquest. The heroism of illness defends life's lost redoubts. The losses are irrevocable not only for sick people but also for those who suffer frequently from depressive fits. This explains why current psychological interpretations find no adequate justification for the fear of death common in some types of depression. The structure of depressive states holds the key to their fundamental understanding. These states, in which separation from the world steadily and painfully increases, bring man closer to his inner reality and cause him to discover death in his own subjectivity. A growing interiority progresses toward the essential center of subjectivity, overcoming all the social forms which usually mask it. Once beyond this center, progressive interiority discovers the region where life mingles with death, where man has not yet detached himself from the primary sources of existence, where the demonic rhythm of life works with complete irrationality. In cases of depression, the awareness of death's immanence in life creates an atmosphere of constant dissatisfaction and restlessness that can never be appeased.

The presence of death in life introduces into one's existence an element of nothingness. One cannot conceive of death without nothingness, nor of life without a principle of negativity. The fear of death, which is nothing but the fear of the nothingness into which death throws us, proves that death

presupposes nothingness. The immanence of death in life is a sign of the final triumph of nothingness over life, thus showing that the presence of death has no other meaning than to open progressively the way toward nothingness.

Even though belief in eternity is necessary as historical man's unique consolation, the catastrophic ending of this tragedy of life and of man in particular will demonstrate the illusion of such naive faith.

The only fear is, in fact, the fear of death. Different kinds of fears are merely a manifestation of the same fundamental psychological reality in its various aspects. Those who try to eliminate the fear of death through artificial reasoning are totally mistaken, because it is impossible to cancel an organic fear by way of abstract constructs. Whoever seriously considers the question of death must be afraid. Even those who believe in eternity do so because they are afraid of death. There is in their faith a painful effort to save - even without an absolute certitude - the world of values in which they live and to which they contribute, an effort to defeat the nothingness inherent in the temporal and attain the universal in eternity. Death met without religious faith leaves nothing standing. Universal category and form berne illusory and irrelevant when confronted with the irreversible annihilation of death. Never will form and category grasp the intimate meanings of life and death. Could idealism or rationalism counteract death? Not at all. Yet other philosophies and doctrines say almost nothing about death. The only valid attitude is absolute silence or a cry of despair.

Some people maintain that the fear of death does not have a deeper justification, because as long as there is an I there is no death, and once dead there is no I any longer. These people have forgotten about the very strange phenomenon of gradual agony. What comfort does this artificial distinction between the I and death offer a man who has a strong premonition of death? What meaning can logical argument or subtle thought have for someone deeply imbued with a feeling of the irrevocable? All attempts to bring existential questions onto a logical plane are null and void. Philosophers are too proud to confess their fear of death and too supercilious to acknowledge the spiritual fecundity of illness. Their reflections on death exhibit a hypocritical serenity; in fact, they tremble

with fear more than anyone else. One should not forget that philosophy is the art of masking inner torments.

The feeling for the irreversible and the irrevocable, which always accompanies the awareness of agony, can achieve a painful acceptance mixed with fear, but there is no such thing as love or sympathy for death. The art of dying cannot be learned, because there is no technique, there are no rules. The irrevocability of agony is experienced by each individual alone, through infinite and intense suffering. Most people are unaware of the slow agony within themselves. For them there is only one kind of agony, the one immediately preceding the fall into absolute nothingness. Only such moments of agony bring about important existential revelations in consciousness. That is why they expect everything from the end instead of trying to grasp the meaning of a slow revelatory agony. The end will reveal too little, and they will die as ignorant as they have lived.

Since agony unfolds in time, temporality is a condition not only for creativity but also for death, for the dramatic phenomenon of dying. The demonic character of time, in which both life and death, creation and destruction, evolve without convergence toward a transcendental plane, is thus made manifest.

The feeling of the irrevocable, which appears as an ineluctable necessity going against the grain of our innermost tendencies, is conceivable only because of time’s demonism. The conviction that you cannot escape an implacable fate and that time will do nothing but unfold the dramatic process of destruction is an expression of irrevocable agony. Isn’t nothingness, then, salvation? But how can there be salvation in nothingness? If salvation is nearly impossible through existence, how can it be possible through the complete absence of existence?

Since there is no salvation either in existence or in nothingness, let this world with its eternal laws be smashed to pieces!

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Melancholy

Every state of the soul adopts its own external form or transforms the soul according to its nature. In all great and profound states there is a close correspondence between the subjective and the objective level. Overflowing enthusiasm is inconceivable in a flat and closed space. Men's eyes see outwardly that which troubles them internally. Ecstasy is never a purely internal consummation; it externalizes a luminous inner intoxication. It would suffice simply to look at the face of an ecstatic to grasp fully all the elements of his inner tension.

Why does melancholy require exterior infinity? Because it is boundless and void expansion. One can cross boundaries either positively or negatively. Exuberance, enthusiasm, fury, are positive slates of overflowing intensity which break restrictive barriers and go beyond normal states. They spring from an excess of life, vitality, and organic expansion. In such positive states, life goes beyond its normal boundaries not to negate itself but to liberate its smoldering energies, which would otherwise unleash a violent conflagration. Crossing boundaries has a totally different meaning for negative spiritual states since it does not happen from an overflow of plenitude but from quite the contrary. A void originates in the depths of being, spreading progressively like a cancer.

The sensation of expansion toward nothingness present in melancholy has its roots in a weariness characteristic of all negative states. This weariness separates man from the world. Life's intense rhythm, its organic inner pulse, weakens. Weariness is the first organic determinant of knowledge. Because it creates the necessary conditions for man's differentiation from the world, weariness leads one to the perspective which places the world in front of man. Weariness also takes one below life's normal level, allowing only a vague premonition of vital signs. Melancholy therefore springs from a region where life is uncertain and problematic. Its origin explains its fertility for knowledge and its sterility for life.

Whereas in ordinary states of mind one is in close contact with life's individual aspects, in melancholy, being separated from them produces a vague feeling of the world. Solitary experience and a strange vision melt the substantial forms of the world. They take on an immaterial and transparent garb. Progressive detachment from all that is particular and concrete raises one to a vision which gains in size what it loses in substance. No melancholy state can exist without this ascent, this flight toward the heights, this elevation above the world. Neither pride nor scorn, despair nor any impulse toward infinite negativity, but long meditation and vague dreaminess born of weariness lead to this kind of elevation. Man grows wings in melancholy not in order to enjoy the world but in order to be alone. What is the meaning of loneliness in melancholy? Isn't it related to the feeling of interior and exterior infinity? The melancholy look is expressionless, without perspective. The interior infinitude and vagueness of melancholy, not to be confused with the fecund infinity of love, demands a space whose borders are ungraspable. Melancholy is without clear or precise intentions, whereas ordinary experience requires concrete objects and forms.

Melancholy detachment removes man from his natural surroundings. His outlook on infinity shows him to be lonely and forsaken. The sharper our consciousness of the world's infinity, the more acute our awareness of our own finitude. In some states this awareness is painfully depressing, but in melancholy it is less tormenting and sometimes even rather voluptuous.

The disparity between the world's infinity and man's finitude is a serious cause for despair; but when one looks at this disparity in states of melancholy, it ceases to be painful and the world appears endowed with a strange, sickly beauty. Real solitude implies a painful intermission in man's life, a lonely struggle with the angel of death. To live in solitude means to relinquish all expectations about life. The only surprise in solitude is death. The great solitaries retreated from the world not to prepare themselves for life but, rather, to await with resignation its end. No messages about life ever issue forth from deserts and caves. Haven't we proscribed all religions that began in the desert? All the illuminations and dreams of the great solitaries reveal an apocalyptic vision of downfall and the end rather than a crown of lights and triumphs.

The solitude of the melancholic man is less profound. It even has sometimes an esthetic character. Don’t we talk of sweet melancholy or of voluptuous melancholy? Melancholy is an esthetic mood because of its very passivity.

The esthetic attitude toward life is characterized by contemplative passivity, randomly selecting everything that suits its subjectivity. The world is a stage, and man, the spectator, passively watches it. The conception of life as spectacle eliminates its tragic element as well as those antinomies which drag you like a whirlwind into the painful drama of the world. The esthetic experience, where each moment is a matter of impressions, can hardly surmise the great tensions inherent in the experience of the tragic, where each moment is a matter of destiny. Dreaminess, central to all esthetic states, is absent from tragedy. Passivity, dreaminess, and voluptuous enchantment form the esthetic elements of melancholy. Yet, due to its multifarious forms, it is not purely esthetic. Black melancholy is also fairly frequent.

But first, what is sweet melancholy? On summer afternoons haven’t you experienced that sensation of strange pleasure when you abandon yourself to the senses without any special thought and when intimations of serene eternity bring an unusual peace to your soul? It is as if all worldly worries and all spiritual doubts grow dumb in front of a display of overwhelming beauty, whose seductions render all questions superfluous. Beyond turmoil and effervescence, a quiet existence enjoys the surrounding splendor with discreet voluptuousness. Calm, the absence of intensity of any kind, is essential to melancholy. Regret, also inherent in melancholy, expands its lack of intensity. But though regret may be persistent, it is never so intense as to cause deep suffering. Regret expresses affectively a profound phenomenon: the advance through life into death. It shows us how much has died in us. I regret something which died in me and from me. I bring back to life only the ghost of past experiences. Regret reveals the demonic significance of time: while bringing about growth, it implicitly triggers death.

Regret makes man melancholy without paralyzing or cutting short his aspirations, because in regret the awareness of the irredeemable focuses on

the past and the future is still left somewhat open. Melancholy is not a state of concentrated, closed seriousness brought forth by an organic affliction, because it lacks the terrible sense of irrevocability so characteristic of states of genuine sadness. Even black melancholy is only a temporary mood, not a constitutional feature. Its dreamy character never completely absent, black melancholy can never be a true illness. Sweet and voluptuous melancholy, as well as black melancholy, exhibits similar traits: interior void, exterior infinity, vagueness of sensations, dreaminess, sublimation. Their differentiation is apparent only from the point of view of affective tonalities. It may be that the multipolarity of melancholy derives more from the structure of subjectivity than from its own nature. Not particularly intense, it fluctuates more than other states. Endowed with more poetic than active virtues, it possesses a certain subdued gracefulness totally absent from tragic and intense sadness.

The same gracefulness marks melancholy landscapes. The wide perspective of Dutch or Renaissance landscape, with its eternity of lights and shadows, its undulating vales symbolizing infinity, its transfiguring rays of light which spiritualize the material world and the hopes and regrets of men who smile wisely - the whole perspective breathes an easy melancholy grace. In such a landscape, man seems to say regretfully and resignedly: “What can we do? It’s all we have!” At the end of all melancholy there is a chance of consolation or resignation. Its esthetic aspect holds possibilities for future harmony which are absent from profound organic sadness. The latter ends in the irrevocable, the former in graceful dream.

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Nothing Is Important

How important can it be that I suffer and think? My presence in this world will disturb a few tranquil lives and will unsettle the unconscious and pleasant naiveté of others. Although I feel that my tragedy is the greatest in history - greater than the fall of empires - I am nevertheless aware of my total insignificance. I am absolutely persuaded that I am nothing in this universe; yet I feel that mine is the only real existence. If I had to choose between the world and me, I would reject the world, its lights and laws, unafraid to glide alone in absolute nothingness. Although life for me is torture, I cannot renounce it, because I do not believe in the absolute values in whose name I would sacrifice myself. If I were to be totally sincere, I would say that I do not know why I live and why I do not stop living. The answer probably lies in the irrational character of life which maintains itself without reason. What if there were only absurd motives for living? Could they still be called motives? This world is not worth a sacrifice in the name of an idea or a belief. How much happier are we today because others have died for our wellbeing and our enlightment? Wellbeing? Enlightment? If anybody had died so that I could be happy, then I would be even more unhappy, because I do not want to build my life on a graveyard. There are moments when I feel responsible for all the suffering in history, since I cannot understand why some have shed blood for us. It would be a great irony if we could determine that they were happier than we are. Let history crumble into dust! Why should I bother? Let death appear in a ridiculous light; suffering, limited and unrevealing; enthusiasm, impure; life, rational; life’s dialectics, logical rather than demonic; despair, minor and partial; eternity, just a word; the experience of nothingness, an illusion; fatality, a joke! I seriously ask myself, What is the meaning of all this? Why raise questions, throw lights, or see shadows? Wouldn’t it be better if I buried my tears in the sand on a seashore in utter solitude? But I never cried, because my tears have always turned into thoughts. And my thoughts are as bitter as tears.

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Ecstasy

I do not know what the skeptic, for whom this world is a world in which nothing is solved, thinks of ecstasy - the richest and most dangerous ecstasy, the ecstasy of life's ultimate origins. You do not gain explicit certainty or definite knowledge by it; yet the feeling of essential participation is so intense that it surpasses all limits and categories of common knowledge. A gate opens from this world of toil, pain, and suffering to the inner sanctum of life, where we apprehend a most simple vision in a glorious metaphysical trance. Superficial and individual layers of existence melt away, revealing original depths. I wonder whether a truly metaphysical feeling is even possible without the disappearance of superficial forms? One reaches the center of life only by purifying it of contingent and accidental elements. A metaphysical existential feeling is by definition ecstatic, and all metaphysical systems have roots in forms of ecstasy. There are many other forms of ecstasy which, given a certain spiritual or temperamental configuration, do not necessarily lead to transcendence. Why shouldn't there be an ecstasy of pure existence? Metaphysical existentialism is born out of ecstasy in front of the world's primordial origins; it is the ultimate intoxication, ecstatic bliss in the contemplation of essence. Ecstasy - exaltation in immanence, illumination, a vision of this world's madness - such is the basis of any metaphysics, valid even in the final moments of life. Any true ecstasy is dangerous. It resembles the last stage of initiation in the Egyptian mysteries when, instead of the ultimate knowledge, one is told, "Osiris is a black divinity." The absolute remains unlovable. I see a form of madness, not of knowledge, in the ecstasy of life's ultimate origins. You cannot experience it except in solitude, when you feel as if you were floating above the world. Solitude is the proper milieu for madness. It is noteworthy that even the skeptic can experience this kind of ecstasy. Does not the madness of ecstasy reveal itself through this odd combination of certitude and essence with doubt and despair?

Nobody will experience ecstasy without having experienced despair beforehand, because both states presuppose equally radical purifications,

though different in kind.

The roots of metaphysics are as complex as those of existence.

The World in Which Nothing Is Solved

Is there anything on earth which cannot be doubted except death, the only certainty in this world? To doubt and yet to live - this is a paradox, though not a tragic one, since doubt is less intense, less consuming, than despair. Abstract doubt, in which one participates only partially, is more frequent, whereas in despair one participates totally and organically. Not even the most organic and serious forms of doubt ever reach the intensity of despair. In comparison with despair, skepticism is characterized by a certain amount of dilettantism and superficiality. I can doubt everything, I may very well smile contemptuously at the world, but this will not prevent me from eating, from sleeping peacefully, and from marrying. In despair, whose depth one can fathom only by experiencing it, such actions are possible only with great effort. On the heights of despair, nobody has the right to sleep. Thus a genuinely desperate man cannot forget his own tragedy: his consciousness preserves the painful actuality of his subjective torment. Doubt is anxiety about problems and things, and has its origins in the unsolvable nature of all big questions. If such questions could be solved, the skeptic would revert to more normal states. The condition of the desperate man in this respect is utterly different: if all problems were solved, he would not be any less anxious, since his anxiety arises out of his own subjective existence. Despair is the state in which anxiety and restlessness are immanent to existence. Nobody in despair suffers from Problems, but from his own inner torment and fire. It’s a pity that nothing can be solved in this world. Yet there never was and here never will be anyone who would commit suicide for this reason. So much for the power that intellectual anxiety has over the total anxiety of our being! That is why I prefer the dramatic life, consumed by inner fires and tortured by destiny, to the intellectual, caught up in abstractions which do not engage the essence of our subjectivity. I despise the absence of risks, madness and passion in abstract thinking. How fertile

live, passionate thinking is! Lyricism feeds it like blood pumped into the heart! It is interesting to observe the dramatic process by which men, originally preoccupied with abstract and impersonal problems, so objective as to forget themselves, come to reflect upon their own subjectivity and upon existential questions once they experience sickness and suffering. Active and objective men do not have enough inner resources to make an interesting problem of their own destiny. One must descend all the circles of an inner hell to turn one's destiny into a subjective yet universal problem. If you are not burned to ashes, you will then be able to philosophize lyrically. Only when you do not deign even to despise this world of unsolvable problems will you finally come to achieve a superior form of personal existence. And this will be so not because you have any special value or excellence, but because nothing interests you beyond your own personal agony.

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The Contradictory and the Inconsequential

Those who write under the spell of inspiration, for whom thought is an expression of their organic nervous disposition, do not concern themselves with unity and systems. Such concerns, contradictions, and facile paradoxes indicate an impoverished and insipid personal life. Only great and dangerous contradictions betoken a rich spiritual life, because only they constitute a mode of realization for life's abundant inner flow. People who know only a few spiritual states and never live on the edge do not have contradictions, because their limited resources cannot form oppositions. But how can those who violently experience hatred, despair, chaos, nothingness, or love, who burn with each passion and gradually die with each and in each, those who can only breathe on heights, who are always alone, especially when they are with others - how can they grow in linear fashion and crystallize into a system? All that is form, system, category, frame, or plan tends to make things absolute and springs from a lack of inner energy, from a sterile spiritual life. Life's great tensions verge on chaos and the madness of exaltation. Rich spiritual life must know chaos and the effervescent paroxysm of illness, because in them inspiration appears to be essential for creation and contradictions become expressions of high inner temperatures. Nobody who does not love chaos is a creator, and whoever is contemptuous of illness must not speak of the spirit. There is value only in that which bursts forth from inspiration, which springs up from the irrational depths of our being, from the secret center of our subjectivity. The fruit of labor, effort, and endeavor has no value, and the offspring of intelligence is sterile and unintresting. I delight in the barbaric and spontaneous élan of inspiration, effervescent spiritual states, essential lyricism, and inner tension - these things make inspiration the only reality of creation.

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On Sadness

While melancholy is a state of vague dreaminess, never deep or intense, sadness is closed, serious, and painfully interiorized. One can be sad anywhere, but sadness grows in intensity in a closed space while melancholy flourishes in open spaces. Sadness almost always stems from a precise motive and is therefore concentrated, whereas there are no exterior causes for melancholy. I know why I am sad, but I do not know why I am melancholy. Melancholy states last a long time without reaching any great intensity. Or, rather, their long duration erases from consiousness any original motive, whereas in sadness, which is not long lasting, the motive remains present, generating a self-contained inner tension which will never explode but slowly die in itself. Neither melancholy nor sadness explodes; neither shatters lives. One speaks of a sad sigh, never a scream of sadness. Sadness is not an overwhelming state. To understand it's nature, it is important to consider it's frequent occurrence after moments of fulfillment. Why does sadness follow intercourse? Why are we sad after a great drinking bout or moments of Dionysiac excess? Great joys, why do they bring us sadness? Because there remains from these excesses only a feeling of irrevocable loss and desertion which reaches a high degree of negative intensity. At such moments, instead of a gain, one keenly feels loss. Sadness accompanies all those events in which life expends itself. It's intensity is equal to it's loss. Thus death causes the greatest sadness. That one can never speak of a funeral as "melancholy" shows an important difference between sadness and melancholy. Also, the esthetic aspect of melancholy is entirely absent from sadness. It is worthwhile noticing how the domain of esthetics narrows gradually as it approaches serious reality and crucial life events. Death, suffering, and sadness negate esthetics. Death and beauty are totally opposed notions. I know nothing more disgusting than death, nothing more serious and more sinister! How could some poets find beautiful this ultimate negation which cannot even wear the mask of the grotesque? It is ironic that one fears it the more one admires it. I must confess that I admire death's negativity. It is the only thing I can admire and yet not love. Its grandeur and infinity impress me, but my despair is so vast that I don't even

harbor the hope of death. How could I love death? One can only write about it in contradictory ways. Whoever says that he knows something definite about death shows that he has not even a premonition, although he bears it within himself. Every man bears with him not only his life but also his death. Life is just a long, drawn-out agony.

It seems to me that sadness partakes of this agony. The writhings of sadness, don't they express agony? These contortions, negations of beauty, betray so much solitude that one must ask oneself if the physiognomy of sadness is not a mode of objectifying death in life. Sadness is a way into a mystery, a mystery so rich that sadness never ceases to remain enigmatic. If there were a scale for mysteries, sadness would belong to a group of infinite mysteries, mysteries without limit, inexhaustible, an observation which, to my great regret, is always verifiable: only those are happy who never think or, rather, who only think about life's bare necessities, and to think about such things means not to think at all. True thinking resembles a demon who muddies the spring of life or a sickness which corrupts its roots. To think all the time, to raise questions, to doubt your own destiny, to feel the weariness of living, to be worn out to the point of exhaustion by thoughts and life, to leave behind you, as symbols of your life's drama, a trail of smoke and blood - all this means you are so unhappy that reflection and thinking appear as a curse causing a violent revulsion in you. There are many things on could regret in this world in which one shouldn't regret any thing. But I ask myself; Is the world worthy of my regrets?

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Total Dissatisfaction

Why this curse on some of us who can never feel at ease anywhere, neither in the sun nor out of it, neither with men nor without them? Ignorant of good humor, an amazing achievement! Those who have no access to irresponsibility are the most wretched. To possess a high degree of consciousness, to be always aware of yourself in relation to the world, to live in the permanent tension of knowledge, means to be lost for life. Knowledge is the plague of life, and consciousness, an open wound in its heart. Is it not tragic to be man, that perpetually dissatisfied animal suspended between life and death? I'm weary of being a man. If I could, I would renounce my condition on the spot, but what would I become then, an animal? I cannot retrace my steps. Besides, I might become an animal who knows the history of philosophy. As to becoming superman, that seems to me utter and ridiculous folly. Could there be a solution, approximate of course, in a sort of superconsciousness? Couldn't one live beyond (not just on this side, toward animality) all complex forms of consciousness, anxiety, agony, in a sphere of life where access to eternity would no longer be pure myth? As far as I am concerned, I resign from humanity. I no longer want to be, nor can still be, a man. What should I do? Work for a social and political system, make a girl miserable? Hunt for weaknesses in philosophical systems, fight for moral and esthetic ideals? It's all too little. I renounce my humanity even though I may find myself alone. But am I not already alone in this world from which I no longer expect anything? Beyond present-day common ideals and forms, one might breathe in a superconsciousness where the intoxication of eternity would do away with the qualms of this world, and where being would be just as pure and immaterial as nonbeing.

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The Bath of Fire

There are so many ways to achieve the sensation of immateriality that it would be difficult, if not futile, to make a classification. Nevertheless, I think that the bath of fire is one of the best. The bath of fire: your being ablaze, all flashes and sparks, consumed by flames as in Hell. The bath of fire purifies so radically that it does away with existence. Its heat waves and scorching flames burn the kernel of life, smothering its vital elan, turning its aggressiveness into aspiration. To live in a bath of fire, transfigured by its rich glow - such is the state of immaterial purity where one is nothing but a dancing flame. Freed from the laws of gravity, life becomes illusion or dream. But this is not all: at the end, a most curious and paradoxical sensation occurs, the feeling of dreamy unreality gives way to the sensation of becoming ash. The bath of fire invariable ends thus: when the inner conflagration has scorched the ground of your being, when all is ashes, what else is there left to experience? There is both mad delight and infinite irony in the thought of my ashes scattered to the four winds, sown frenetically in space, an eternal reproach to the world.

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Disintegration

Not everybody loses his innocence: therefore not everybody is unhappy. Those who live naively, not out of stupidity - innocence is a pure state which excludes such deficiencies - but out of instinctive and organic love for nature, whose charm innocence is always quick to discover, those are the ones who achieve harmony, an integration with life, much coveted by those who struggle on the heights of despair. Disintegration implies total loss of innocence, that lovely gift destroyed by knowledge, life's enemy. Rich ground for love and enthusiasm, innocence is delight in the natural charm of being and the unconscious experience of contradictions which no longer have a tragic character. To attain the virginal joy of innocence, one must not live contradictions consciously, or know tragedy and thoughts of death, because such knowledge is baffling, complex, and requires disjunction. Innocence resists tragedy but welcomes love, because the innocent, never troubled by inner contradictions, have generous impulses. For the man who has cut himself off from life, tragedy is intensely painful because contradictions arise not only inside himself but also between him and the rest of the world. There are only two fundamental attitudes: the naive and the heroic. All the others partake of them. One must choose between these two in order to avoid idiocy. But for the man who has come to make such a choice, innocence is no longer an option, so there remains only heroism. The latter is both a privilege and a curse for those severed from life, incapable of fulfillment and happiness. To be a hero - in the most universal sense of the wordmeans to aspire to absolute triumph. But such triumphs come only through death. Heroism means transcending life; it is a fatal leap into nothingness, even though the hero may not be aware that his energy springs from a life deprived of its normal supports. All that is innocence, and does not lead to it, belongs to nothingness. Can one speak of the seductions of nothingness? If we do, we must add that they are much too mysterious to penetrate.

On the Reality of the Body

I can never understand why so many have called the body an illusion, just as I will never understand how they could imagine spirituality outside the drama of life, with all its contradictions and shortcomings. It must be that they were never aware of the flesh, the nerves, each organ in itself. But while I do not understand this lack of awareness, I believe it is a necessary condition for happiness. Those still attached to life's irrationality, and still enthralled by its organic rhythms prior to the birth of consciousness, are ignorant of the state in which the reality of the body is ever-present to consciousness. This presence denotes a fundamental existential illness. Is it not an illness to be constantly aware of your nerves, your feet, your stomach, your heart, every single part of your being? With this awareness, haven't the organs abandoned normal functions? The reality of the body is one of the most terrible realities. What would the spirit be without the torments of the flesh, and consciousness without a great nervous sensibility? How could one imagine life without the body, as a free and unconditional existence of the spirit? Only healthy and irresponsible men who have no spirit could think this. The spirit is the offspring of an existential illness, and Man is a sick animal. Spirit in life is an anomaly. I have renounced so much, why should I not renounce spirit as well? But besides being an illness of life, is not renunciation first and foremost an illness of the spirit?

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I Do Not Know

I do not know what is right and what is wrong; what is allowed and what is not; I cannot judge and I cannot praise. There are no valid criteria and no consistent principles in the world. It surprises me that some people still concern themselves with a theory of knowledge. To tell the truth, I couldn't care less about the relativity of knowledge, simply because the world does not deserve to be known. At times I feel as if I had total knowledge, exhausting the content of this world; at other times the world around me does not make any sense. Everything then has a bitter taste, there is in me a devilish, monstrous bitterness that renders even death insipid. I realize now for the first time how hard it is to define this bitterness. It may be that I'm wasting my time trying to establish a theoretical basis for it when in fact it originates in a pretheoretical zone. At this moment I do not believe in anything and I have no hope. All forms and expressions that give life its charm seem to me meaningless. I have no feeling either for the future or for the past, while the present seems to me poison. I do not know whether I am desperate or not, since lack of hope does not automatically imply despair. I could be called anything because I stand to lose nothing. I've lost everything! Flowers are blooming and birds are singing all around me! How distant I am from everything!

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On Individual and Cosmic Loneliness

One can experience loneliness in two ways: by feeling lonely in the world or by feeling the loneliness of the world. Individual loneliness is a personal drama; one can feel lonely even in the midst of great natural beauty. An outcast in the world, indifferent to its being dazzling or dismal, self-consumed with triumphs and failures, engrossed in inner drama - such is the fate of the solitary. The feeling of cosmic loneliness, on the other hand, stems not so much from man's subjective agony as from an awareness of the world's isolation, of objective nothingness. It is as if all the splendors of this world were to vanish at once, leaving behind the dull monotony of a cemetery. Many are haunted by the vision of an abandoned world encased in glacial solitude, untouched by even the pale reflections of a crepuscular light. Who is more unhappy? He who feels his own loneliness or he who feels the loneliness of the world? Impossible to tell, and besides, why should I bother with a classification of loneliness? Is it not enough that one is alone?

I leave it in writing for those who will come after me that I do not believe in anything and that forgetfulness is the only salvation. I would like to forget everything, to forget myself and to forget the world. True confessions are written with tears only. But my tears would drown the world, as my inner fire would reduce it to ashes. I don't need any support, encouragement, or consolation because, although I am the lowest of men, I feel nonetheless so strong, so hard, so savage! For I am the only man who lives without hope, the apex of heroism and paradox. The ultimate madness! I should channel my chaotic and unbridled passion into forgetfulness, escaping spirit and consciousness. I too have a hope: a hope for absolute forgetfulness. But is it hope or despair? Is it not the negation of all future hopes? I want not to know, not to know even that I do not know. Why so many problems, arguments, vexations? Why the consciousness of death? How much longer all this thinking and philosophizing?

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Apocalypse

How I would love one day to see all people, young and old, sad or happy, men and women, married or not, serious or superficial leave their homes and their work places, relinquish their duties and responsibilities, gather in the streets and refuse to do anything anymore. At that moment, let slaves to senseless work, who have been toiling for future generations under the dire delusion that they contribute to the good of humanity, avenge themselves on the mediocrity of a sterile and insignificant life, on the tremendous waste that never permitted spiritual transfiguration. At that moment, when all faith and resignation are lost, let the trappings of ordinary life burst once and for all. Let those who suffer silently, not even uttering a sigh of complaint, yell with all their might, making a strange, menacing, dissonant clamor that would shake the earth. Let the waters flow faster and the mountains sway threateningly, the trees show their roots like an eternal and hideous reproach, the birds croak like ravens, and the animals scatter in fright and fall from exhaustion. Let ideals be declared void; beliefs, trifles; art, a lie; and philosophy, a joke. Let everything be climax and anticlimax. Let lumps of earth leap into the air and crumble in the wind; let plants make strange arabesques, frightful and distorted shapes, in the sky. Let wildfires spread rapidly and a terrifying noise drown out everything so that even the smallest animal would know that the end is near. Let all form become formless, and chaos swallow the structure of the world in a gigantic maelstrom. Let there be tremendous commotion and noise, terror, and explosion, and then let there be eternal silence and total forgetfulness. And in those final moments, let all that humanity has felt until now, hope, regret, love, despair, and hatred, explode with such force that nothing is left behind. Would not such moments be the triumph of nothingness and the final apotheosis of nonbeing?

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The Monopoly of Suffering

I ask myself; Why is it that only some people suffer? Why are only some selected from the ranks of normal people and put on the torture rack? Some religions maintain that God is trying us through suffering, or that we expiate evil and unbelief through it. If such an explanation can satisfy the religious man, it is not sufficient for anyone who notices that suffering is arbitrary and unjust, because the innocent often suffer most. There is no valid justification for suffering. Suffering has no hierarchy of values.

The most interesting aspect of suffering is the sufferer's belief in its absoluteness. He believes he has a monopoly on suffering. I think that I alone suffer, that I alone have the right to suffer, although I also realize that there are modalities of suffering more terrible than mine, pieces of flesh falling from the bones, the body crumbling under one's very eyes, monstrous, criminal, shameful sufferings. One asks oneself, How can this be, and if it be, how can one still speak of finality and other such old wives' tales? Suffering moves me so much that I lose all my courage. I lose heart because I do not understand why there is suffering in the world. Its origin in life's bestiality, irrationality, and demonism explains the presence of suffering in the world but does not justify it. Or maybe suffering has no more justification than life. Was life necessary? Or is its rationale purely immanent? Why should we not reconcile ourselves to the final triumph of nonbeing, to the thought that existence advances toward nothingness and being toward nonbeing? Isn't nonbeing the last absolute reality? This is as challenging a paradox as that of the world.

Although suffering moves me and sometimes even delights me, never could I write the apologia of suffering, because longlasting suffering - and all genuine suffering is longlasting - though purifying in its first phases, unhinges the reason, dulls the senses, and finally destroys. Facile enthusiasm for suffering is professed only by esthetes and dilettantes of suffering, those who mistake it for entertainment and who do not understand that there is in suffering both poison, a formidable destructive

energy, and a rich fertility, dearly paid for. To have the monopoly of suffering is to live suspended above the abyss. All suffering is an abyss.

those who maintain that suicide is an assertion of life are cowards. They invent explanations and excuses to mask their impotence and lack of daring, for in fact there can be no willed or rational decision to commit suicide, only organic, secret causes which predetermine it.

Those who commit suicide have a pathological attraction for death, which they try to resist consciously but which they cannot totally suppress. Life in them is so unbalanced that no rational argument could set it right. There are no rational suicides, following to a logical conclusion a meditation on nothingness and the futility of life. If one argues that there were wise men in antiquity who committed suicide in solitude, I reply that they could do so only because they had already stifled life in themselves. To meditate on death and on similar dangerous topics is to deal life a mortal blow, for the mind contemplating so many agonizing questions must already have been wounded. No one commits suicide for external reasons, only because of inner disequilibrium. Under similar adverse circumstances, some are indifferent, some are moved, some are driven to suicide. To be obsessed with suicide, there must be such inner agony that all self-imposed barriers break and nothing is left but a catastrophic dizziness, a strange and powerful whirlwind. How could suicide be an assertion of life? They say that it is caused by disappointments, which implies that you have desired life, that you had expectations which it did not fulfill. A false dialectic! As if the suicide did not live before he died, did not have hopes, ambitions, pain.

Essential to suicide is the belief that you can no longer live, not because of whim but because of a terrifying inner tragedy. Is the inability live an assertion of life? Any suicide is impressive. So I wonder why people still look for reasons and justifications, why the even deprecate it. Nothing is more ridiculous than to make a hierarchy of suicides and divide them between the noble and the vulgar. Taking one’s life is sufficiently impressive to forestall any petty hunt for motives. I despise those who scoff at suicides committed for love, because they do not understand that, to the lover unfulfilled love is the cancellation of his being, a destructive plunge

into meaninglessness. Unrealized passions lead to death faster than great failures. Great failures are slow agony, but great passions that are thwarted kill like a bolt of lightning. I admire only two types of people: the potentially mad and the potential suicide. Only they inspire me with awe, because only they are capable of great passions and great spiritual transfigurations. Those who live positively, full of self-assurance, content with their past, present, and future, have only my respect.

Why don't I commit suicide? Because I am as sick of death as I am of life. I should be cast into a flaming caldron! Why am I on this earth? I feel the need to cry out, to utter a savage scream that will set the world atremble with dread. I am like a lightning bolt ready to set the world ablaze and swallow it all in the flames of my nothingness. I am the most monstrous being in history, the beast of the apocalypse full of fire and darkness, of aspirations and despair. I am the beast with a contorted grin, contracting down to illusion and dilating toward infinity, both growing and dying, delightfully suspended between hope for nothing and despair of everything, brought up among perfumes and poisons, consumed with love and hatred, killed by lights and shadows. My symbol is the death of light and the flame of death. Sparks die in me only to be reborn as thunder and lightning. Darkness itself glows in me.

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Absolute Lyricism

I would like to explode, flow, crumble into dust, and my disintegration would be my masterpiece. I would like to melt in the world and for the world to melt orgasmically in me and thus in our delirium to engender an apocalyptic dream, strange and grandiose like all crepuscular visions. Let our dream bring forth mysterious splendors and triumphant shadows, let a general conflagration swallow the world, and let its flames generate crepuscular pleasures as intricate as death and as fascinating as nothingness. Lyricism reaches its ultimate form of expression only through delirium. Absolute lyricism is the lyricism of last moments. In it, expression becomes reality, ceasing to be a partial, minor, and unrevealing objectification. Not only your intelligence and your sensitivity, but your entire being, your life, and your body participate in it. Absolute lyricism is destiny which has reached absolute self-knowledge. Such lyricism will never take an objective and separate form, for it is your own flesh and blood. It only emerges at those crucial moments when experience is expression. Death's only form is its experience. Thus lyricism is a juxtaposition of act and reality, because the act is no longer a manifestation of reality but reality itself. Absolute lyricism is beyond poetry and sentimentalism, and closer to a metaphysics of destiny, in general, it tends to put everything on the plane of death. All important things bear the sign of death.

The feeling of utter confusion! Not to be able to differentiate, clarify, understand, or appreciate! Such a feeling would make any philosopher a poet, but not all philosophers experience it the feeling of utter confusion! Not to be able to differentiate, clarify, understand, or appreciate! Such a feeling would make any philosopher a poet, but not all philosophers experience it with significant and durable intensity, for if they did, they could no longer philosophize abstractly and rigidly. How a philosopher becomes a poet is like a drama. You fall from a world of abstractions into a whirlwind of feelings, into all the fantastic shapes and figures entangled in the soul. How could the actor of a complicated drama of the soul in which, all at once, erotic anticipation clashes with metaphysical anxiety, fear of death with desire for innocence, total renunciation with paradoxical heroism

despair with pride, forebodings of madness with longings for anonymity, screams with silence, aspiration with nothingnesshow could he still go on philosophizing in a systematic way? There are men who started in the world of abstract forms and ended in absolute confusion. Therefore they can only philosophize poetically. In the state of absolute confusion, only the delights and torments of madness still matter.

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The Meaning of Grace

There are many ways to transcend our blind attachment to life, but only through grace do we not break with its irrational forces; it alone is a futile leap, a disinterested elan which does not spoil life's naive charm. Grace is the joy of soaring upward.

The undulations of graceful movements bespeak light and immaterial flight. They have the spontaneity of wings beating in the air, of smiles, of pure young dreams. Isn't dance grace's best form of expression? In grace, life is a flux of pure vitality, never breaking the harmony of its own rhythms. Life becomes dream, disinterested play, expansion contained in its own borders. Thus it creates a pleasant illusion of freedom, spontaneous abandon, dreams wrought in sunlight. Despair is the paroxysm of individuation, a painful and unique interiorization. Grace, on the other hand, leads to harmony and naive fulfillment, and the graceful being never experiences feelings of loneliness and isolation. Grace is an illusory state in which life negates its antinomies and transcends its demonic dialectic, in which contradictions, fatality, and the consciousness of the irrevocable temporarily vanish. Light and airy, grace sublimates but never purifies, because it never reaches the heights of the sublime. Ordinary experiences never carry life to heights of delirious tension or to the edge of inner abyss, nor do they free it from that symbol of death, the law of gravity. Grace, however, is emancipation from the law, emancipation from subterraneous temptations, from life's demonic claws, its negative tendencies. Transcending negativity is the essential characteristic of grace. It is not surprising, then, that in a state of grace, life appears more luminous, draped in sparkling rays. By transcending all negatives and demons through harmony and lightness of being, grace ascends to a state of wellbeing faster than religious faith, which attains it through suffering and strife. What diversity there is in this world, for right next to grace there is permanent fear, the torture of many…. He who has not experienced absolute fear, universal anxiety, cannot understand struggle, the madness of the flesh and of death. He who has known only grace cannot understand the anxiety of the sick. Only sickness gives birth to serious and deep feelings. Whatever is not born out of sickness has only an esthetic

value. To be ill means to live, willingly or not, on the heights of despair. But such heights presuppose deep chasms, fearful precipices - to live on the heights means to live near the abyss. One must fall in order to reach the heights.

But grace is a state of contentment, even happiness, and it knows neither abyss nor agony. Why are women happier than men? Is it not because in them grace and innocence are more common than in men? They too are affected by sickness and dissatisfaction, but grace predominates. Their naive grace confers on them a state of superficial equilibrium, which never leads to tragic and dangerous tensions. Women are safe on the spiritual plane because in them the dualism between life and the spirit is less intense than in men. A graceful sense of existence does not lead to metaphysical revelations, to a vision of truth, to the sense of an ending which poisons every moment of life. Women are ciphers: the more you think about them, the less you understand them. In front of women one is silent just as one is silent in contemplation of the world’s secret essence. But where the latter is unfathomable infinity, the former is simple mystery, in other words, void. Not greatly disjoined from life, woman is a temporary salvation for those on the heights of despair, because through her a return to life’s unconscious and innocent pleasures is still possible. Grace, if it has not saved the world, has saved its women.

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The Vanity of Compassion

How can one still have ideals when there are so many blind, deaf, and mad people in the world? How can I remorselessly enjoy the light another cannot see or the sound another cannot hear? I feel like a thief of light. Have we not stolen light from the blind and sound from the deaf? Isn't our very lucidity responsible for the madman's darkness? When I think about such things, I lose all courage and will, thoughts seem useless, and compassion, vain. For I do not feel mediocre enough to feel compassion for anyone. Compassion is a sign of superficiality: broken destinies and unrelenting misery either make you scream or turn you to stone. Pity is not only inefficient; it is also insulting. And besides, how can you pity another when you yourself suffer ignominously? Compassion is as common as it is because it does not bind you to anything! Nobody in this world has yet died from another's suffering. And the one who said that he died for us did not die; he was killed.

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Eternity and Morality

Even today nobody can tell what is right or what is wrong. It will be the same in the future. The relativity of such expressions means little; not to be able to dispense with their use is more significant. I don't know what is right and what is wrong, and yet I divide actions into good and bad. If anyone asked me why I do so, I couldn't give an answer. I use moral criteria instinctively; later, when I reconsider, I do not find any justifications for having done so. Morality has become so complex and contradictory because its values no longer constitute themselves in the order of life but have crystallized in a transcendental region only feebly connected to life's vital and irrational forces. How does one go about founding a morality? I'm so sick of the word "good"; it is so stale and vapid! Morality tells you to work for the triumph of goodness! And how? Through the fulfillment of one's duties, respect, sacrifice. These are just empty words: in front of naked reality, moral principles are void, so much so that one wonders whether life without them would not be preferable. I would love a world free of forms and principles, a world of absolute indeterminacy. I like to imagine a world of fantasy and dream, where talk of right and wrong would no longer make sense. Since reality is essentially irrational, why set rules, why distinguish the right from the wrong? Morality cannot be saved; it's a mistake to believe otherwise. Yet there are those who maintain that in this world pleasure and sin are minor satisfactions which enjoy only a brief triumph and that only good deeds partake of eternity. They pretend that at the end of this world's misery, goodness and virtue will win but they have failed to see that, if eternity obliterates superficial pleasures, it does the same with virtue, good deeds, and moral actions. Eternity does not lead to the triumph of either good or evil; it ravages all. It is silly to condemn the Epicureans in the name of eternity. How is suffering rather than pleasure going to make me immortal? From a purely objective point of view, is there any significant difference between one man's agony and another's pleasure? Whether you suffer or not, nothingness will swallow you forever. There is no objective road to eternity, only a subjective feeling experienced at irregular moments in time. Nothing created by man will endure. Why this intoxication with

moral illusions when there are other illusions even more beautiful? Those who speak of moral salvation in the face of eternity refer to the moral action’s indefinite echo in time, its unlimited resonance. Nothing could be less true, since so-called virtuous men are actually cowards who will disappear from the world’s consciousness faster than those who have wallowed in pleasure. And even so, supposing the opposite were true, would a dozen or more years really count? Any unsatisfied pleasure is a loss of life. I shall not be the one to preach against pleasure, orgy, and excess in the name of suffering. Let the mediocre speak of the consequences of pleasure: are not those of suffering even greater? Only the mediocre want to die of old age. Suffer, then, drink pleasure to its last dregs, cry or laugh, scream in despair or with joy, sing about death or love, for nothing will endure! Morality can only make life a long series of missed opportunities!

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Moment and Eternity

Eternity can be understood only as subjective experience. It cannot be conceived objectively, because man's temporal finitude prevents him from grasping the concept of infinity as an unlimited process in time. The experience of eternity therefore depends on intensity of subjective feeling, and the way to eternity is to transcend the temporal. One must fight hard against time so that - once the mirage of the succession of moments is overcome - one can live fully the instant one is launched into eternity. How does the instant become a gate to eternity? A sense of becoming results from the moment's insufficiency and relativity: those with a keen consciousness of temporality live every moment thinking of the next one. Eternity can be attained only if there are no connections, if one lives the instant totally and absolutely. Every experience of eternity presupposes a leap and a transfiguration, and few and far between are those capable of the tension necessary to arrive at the blissful contemplation of the eternal. It is not the length but the intensity of contemplation that matters. The return to normal will not impair the richness of this fertile experience. On the other hand, the frequency with which such contemplations occur matters greatly: only through frequent repetition can one experience the intoxication of eternity, the delights of its luminous, extraterrestrial transcendence. By isolating the moment from its successions, you confer upon it, subjectively, an absolute value. From the point of view of eternity, time with its long train of individual moments is, if not unreal, irrelevant.

There are no hopes or regrets in eternity. To live each moment in itself is to escape the relativity of taste and category, to break free from the immanence in which time has imprisoned us. Immanent living is impossible without simultaneous living in time: without temporality, life loses its dramatic character. The more intense the life, the more revealing its time. Moreover, life consists of a great number of directions, of goals and intentions which can only be achieved in time. When speaking of life, you say moments; of eternity, moment. The experience of eternity is void of life, a conquest of time, a victory over the moments of life. Those with an inborn contemplative sense of eternity, uncontaminated as we are by temporality,

as for example in certain Oriental cultures, know nothing of our dramatic struggle to conquer time. Still, the contemplation of eternity is for us a source of conquering visions and strange delights. One cannot love eternity the way one loves a woman, one’s destiny, or one’s despair, for there is in the love of eternity the attraction of the peace of sidereal light.

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History and Eternity

Why should I live in history, or worry about the social and cultural problems of the age? I am weary of culture and history; I can no longer bring myself to embrace its torments and its aspirations. We must outstrip history, and we can do so only when past, present, and future cease to be important, when where and when we live becomes a matter of indifference. Am I much better off because I live today rather than four thousand years ago in Ancient Egypt? It is silly to pity those who lived in times we don't like, who did not know Christianity or the discoveries of modern science. Since there is no hierarchy of life-styles, everybody and nobody is right all at the same time. Each historical epoch is a world in itself, closed off and certain of its principles, until the dialectic movement of historical life creates a new, equally limited and deficient form. I am surprised that some people study the past when the whole of history strikes me as null and void. Of what interest are the ideals and beliefs of our ancestors? Mankind's achievements could very well be great, but I do not care to know them. I take greater comfort in the contemplation of eternity. In this world not worth so much as a breath, the only valid relation is that between man and eternity, not between man and history. No one negates history out of a passing whim, but only under the impact of harrowing and unsuspected tragedies. Such negations spring from great sadness, not from merely abstract meditations on history. Now that I no longer want to take part in history and I negate the past of humanity, a deadly sadness, painful beyond imagination, preys upon me. Has it been long dormant and just now awakened by these thoughts? There is in me the bitter taste

of death, and nothingness is burning within me like a strong poison. How could I still speak of beauty, and make esthetic remarks, when I am so sad, sad unto death?

I do not want to know anything more. By outstripping history, one acquires superconsciousness, an important ingredient of eternity. It takes you into the realm where contradictions and doubts lose their meaning, where you forget about life and death. It is the fear of death that launches men on their quest

for eternity: its only advantage is forgetfulness. But what about the return from eternity?

Not to Be a Man Anymore

I am more and more persuaded that man is an unhappy animal, abandoned and forced to find his own way in life. Nature has never known anything like him. He suffers a thousandfold more from his so-called freedom than from his imprisonment in natural existence. Not surprisingly, he often longs to be a flower or some other plant. When you come to a point where you want to live like a plant, fully unconscious, then you have come to despair of humanity. But why shouldn't I exchange places with a flower? I already know what it means to be man, to live in history, have ideals: what else is in it for me? To be a man is, of course, a great thing! But it is mainly a tragedy because to be human means to live in a totally different way, more complex and more dramatic than natural existence. Life's tragic character gradually disappears as you go down the scale toward the inanimate realm. Man tends to monopolize tragedy and suffering in the world: that's why salvation for him is a burning insoluble question. I am not proud to be a man, because I know only too well what it is to be man. Only those who have not experienced this state intensely are proud of it, because they intend to become men. Their delight is natural: there are among men some who are not far above plants or animals, and therefore aspire to humanity. But those who know what it means to be Man long to be anything but. If I could, I would choose every day another form, plant or animal, I would be all flowers one by one: weed, thistle, or rose; a tropical tree with a tangle of branches, seaweed cast by the shore, or mountain whipped by winds; bird of prey, a croaking bird, or a bird with melodious song; beast of the forest or

tame animal. Let me live the life of every species, wildly and unself-consciously, let me try out the entire spectrum of nature, let me change gracefully, discreetly, as if it were the most natural procedure. How I would search the nests and caves, wander the deserted mountains and the sea, the

hills and the plains! Only a cosmic adventure of this kind, a series of metamorphoses in the plant and animal realms, would reawaken in me the desire to become Man again. If the difference between Man and animal lies in the fact that the animal can only be an animal whereas man can also be not-man - that is, something other than himself-then I am not-man.

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Magic and Fatality

It is hard for me to imagine the joy of people with magical sensitivity, those people who feel that everything is within their power, for whom there are no obstacles. Magical sensitivity leads only to joy; it knows nothing of the irrevocability and fatality of existence. To feel that you can do anything, that you can hold the absolute in the palm of your hand, that your exuberance is one with the world's, that you are the world, and that its heart beats in you frenetically - these are the ingredients of an unimaginable joy, the exclusive monopoly of those possessed of magical sensitivity. Magic knows nothing of illnesses, or if it does, they are never incurable ones. Magical optimism finds equivalences in everything. Magic rejects the negative, demonic essence of life. He who has this kind of sensitivity cannot understand the triumphs of pain, misery, destiny, death. The illusions of magic negate the irrevocable, reject the inevitability and universality of death. Subjectively, magic is very important because it leads to a state of euphoric exaltation. In it, man lives as if he were never to die. The question of death consists of nothing but the subjective consciousness of death. For those who do not have it, it is totally irrelevant that, through death, they will fall into nothingness. We reach the climax of consciousness through incessant contemplation of death.

Infinitely more complex are those who are conscious of fatality, for whom the insoluble and the irrevocable are real, who feel that effort is vain, and regret, impossible. Essential reality unfolds under the sign of fatality, life's inability to overcome its limited condition. Magic is useful for small and inessential things, but powerless when confronted with metaphysical reality, which requires, most of the time, silence, something magical sensitivity is incapable of. To live with an acute consciousness of fatality, of one's own impotence in the face of life's great problems, which you cannot even pose without tragically implicating yourself in existence, means to engage directly the capital question of life, that of inaccessible and unknowable infinity.

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Unimaginable Joy

You pretend that despair and agony are only preliminaries, that ideally one should overcome them if one is not to become an automaton. You think joy is the only means of salvation and you despise all others? You call the obsession with agony selfishness and find generous impulses only in joy? You offer us this joy; but how can we receive it from the outside? As long as it does not spring from our inner resources, help from the outside is quite useless. How easy it is to recommend joy to those who cannot be joyful! How can one haunted by madness be joyful? Do all those who are so eager to promote joy realize what it means to feel and fear madness closing in, to live all your life with the tormenting presentiment of madness, to which is added the even more persistent and certain consciousness of death? Joy may very well be a state of bliss, but it can only be reached naturally. There may be an end to our agony, and we may still be destined to attain peaceful and serene bliss. Should the gates of Eden be closed to me forever? I have not yet found their key.

Since we cannot be joyful, there only remains the road of agony, of mad exaltation. Let us live the agony fully; let us live our inner tragedy absolutely and frenetically to the very end! All we have left is paroxysm, and when it subsides, there will be just one wisp of smoke … our inner fire will ravish all. Pure and generous, in no need of praise or justification, joy is unwarranted in the face of despair. It does not do anything for the organically desperate while for others it is so seductive that it needs no excuses. The complexity of absolute despair is infinitely greater than that of absolute joy. Is it for this reason that the gates of Eden are forbidden to those who have lost hope?

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The Ambiguity of Suffering

There is no one who, after having endured pain or sickness, does not experience the slightest, vaguest twinge of regret. Although longing to recover, those who suffer intensely for a long time sense an irreparable loss in their improvement. If pain is part of your being, overcoming it is like a loss and causes a pang of regret. I owe to suffering the best parts of myself as well as all that I have lost in life. Therefore I cannot either curse or love suffering. My feeling for it is hard to describe; it is strange, elusive and has the mysterious charm of twilight. Beatitude through suffering is an illusion, since it requires a reconciliation to the fatality of pain in order to avoid total annihilation. Life's last resources smolder under this illusion. The only concession to suffering hides in our regret of potential recovery, but it is so vague and elusive a feeling that it cannot stamp itself on anyone's consciousness. All disappearing pains carry with them this vague discomfort, as if the return to equilibrium forbade the path to alluring yet tormenting realms from which one cannot part without a final backward glance. Since suffering has not revealed Beauty to us, what lights still attract our eye? Are we drawn by the gloom of suffering?

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All Is Dust

There are so many reasons to reject life that it would be impossible to enumerate them all: despair, death, and infinity are only the most obvious. But there are also an equal number of inner, subjective causes, for, where life is concerned, there is no true or false, only our spontaneous reactions. One might call it subjectivism. What does it matter? Isn't intense subjectivity the way to attain universality, exactly as one enters eternity through the instant? Men value solitude so little! They condemn the sterility of all that it has produced and give praise exclusively to social values, for they cherish the illusion that they have all contributed to their creation. They all aspire to great achievements through which they hope to attain immortality. As if they will not crumble into dust!

I am displeased with everything. If they made me God, I would immediately resign, and if the world were just me, I would sunder myself apart, burst into tiny pieces, and disappear. How can there be moments when I feel as if I understand it all?

Enthusiasm as a Form of Love

There are pure, limpid forms of life undisclosed to those living under the sign of despair. Those whose life flows without obstacles reach a stage of delightful contentment in which the world appears charming and full of light. Enthusiasm casts a bewitching light over the world; it is a specific form of love, a way of forgetting oneself. Love has so many faces, so many aspects, and so many deviations that it is hard to find a typical form for it. Any science of love will look first for love's original manifestation. As one speaks of love between the sexes, love of God, for nature or for art, one can also speak of enthusiasm as a form of love. Which form is the essential one from which all others derive? Theologians maintain that it is the love of

God and that all other manifestations are but pale reflections of this fundamental love. Pantheists with esthetic tendencies believe that it is the love of nature, and pure esthetes, the love of art. Similarly, for biologists it is pure sexuality without affection and for metaphysicians it is the feeling of universal identity. Yet not one of them will be able to prove that the form he defends is the most typical, because in the course of history that form has varied so much that nobody today could define it with any certainty.

As for me, I believe that the quintessential form of love is that between a man and a woman, not only sexuality but a rich network of affective states. Has anyone ever committed suicide in the name of God, nature, or art? Love grows in intensity when it fastens on the concrete; one loves a woman for what makes her different, unique in the world: nothing can replace her at the height of passion. All other forms of love, though tending toward autonomy, participate in this essential form. Thus one generally does not place enthusiasm in the realm of love, when in fact its roots penetrate deep into the very substance of love, its emancipating tendencies notwithstanding. There is in the enthusiastic man a universal receptivity, an ability to gather everything with a surplus of energy which spends itself just for the pleasure of acting. The enthusiast heeds no criteria, makes no calculations; he is all abandon, restlessness, and devotion. The joy of achieving and the ecstasy of efficiency are the essential characteristics of the man for whom life is a leap toward heights where destructive forces lose their negative intensity. We all have moments of enthusiasm, but they are too rare to stamp us permanently. I am referring to people in whom enthusiasm is predominant and constitutes the essential mark of their personality. They do not know defeat, because it is not the goal but the initiative and pleasure of acting that attracts them; they throw themselves into action not because they have meditated upon its consequences but simply because they cannot help it. Although not altogether impervious to success, the enthusiast is neither stimulated by it nor defeated by its absence. He is the last one to fail in this world. Life is more mediocre and fragmentary than we think: isn’t this the reason for our decline, the loss of our vivacity, the hardening of our inner rhythms, the gradual slowing down of our vital flow? This process of waste destroys our receptivity and our willingness to embrace life generously and enthusiastically. The enthusiast alone preserves his energy until old age; all others, if not already born dead

like most people, die before their time. How rare the true enthusiast! Can we imagine a world in which everybody will love everything, a world of enthusiasts? Such an image is even more alluring than the image of paradise, because its excesses of generosity surpass any of those in Eden. The enthusiast's ability to be constantly reborn raises him above life's demoniacal temptations, the fear of nothingness, and the torments of agony. His life has no tragic dimension, because enthusiasm is the only form of life totally opaque to death. Even grace - so similar to enthusiasm - has less of this irrational ignorance of death. Grace is full of melancholy charm; not so enthusiasm. My tremendous admiration for enthusiasts stems from my inability to comprehend how there can be such men in a world where death, nothingness, sadness, and despair keep sinister company. It makes one wonder, to see people who are never desperate. How can the enthusiast be indifferent to success? How can he act by virtue of excess only? What kind of strange and paradoxical form does love take in enthusiasm? The more intense love is, the more individualized. Men who love truly and passionately cannot love several women at once: the more intense the love, the more important its object. Let us imagine a passionate love without an object, a man without the woman on whom to concentrate his love: what would it be but the plenitude of love? Are there men with a great potential for love but who have never loved in this primordial, original way? Enthusiasm is love with an unspecified object. Instead of orienting itself toward others, enthusiastic love expends itself lavishly in generous actions, with a sort of universal receptivity.

Enthusiasm is a superior child of Eros. Of all the forms of love, enthusiasm is the most free of sexuality, much more so than mystic love, which cannot shed its sexual symbolism. Thus enthusiasm is spared the anxiety which makes sexuality play an important part in the human tragedy. The enthusiast is preeminently an unproblematic person. He understands many things without ever knowing the agonizing doubts and the chaotic sensitivity of the problematic man. The latter cannot solve anything, because nothing satisfies him. You will find in him neither the enthusiast's gift of abandon, his naive irrationality, nor the charming paradox of love in its purest state. The biblical myth of knowledge as sin is the most profound myth ever invented. The enthusiast's euphoria is due to the fact that he is unaware of the tragedy of knowledge. Why not say it? True knowledge is the most

tenebrous darkness. I would gladly exchange all the harrowing problems of this world for sweet, un-self-conscious naiveté. The spirit does not elevate; it tears you apart. In enthusiasm, as in grace and magic, the spirit does not oppose life. The secret of happiness lies in this original nondivision of an impenetrable unity. If you are an enthusiast, you do not know that poison, duality. Life usually preserves its fecundity and productiveness through the tensions and oppositions of agnostic struggle. Enthusiasm overcomes it, and accedes to a life without tragedy and a love without sexuality.

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Light and Darkness

The falsity of all philosophical and historical systems is best illustrated by the erroneous interpretation of the dualism of light and darkness in Oriental and mystical religions. Thus some have claimed that men, having noticed the regular alternation of day and night, equated the former with life and the latter with mystery and death, raised light and darkness to the rank of metaphysical principles. This interpretation is natural but, like all external explications, insufficient. The question of light and darkness is linked to the question of ecstasy. Their dualism acquires an explanatory value only for one who, successively enslaved by the forces of light and darkness, has known both obsession and captivity. Ecstasy mingles shadows and sparks in a weird dance; it weaves a dramatic vision of fugitive glimmers in mysterious obscurity, playing with all the nuances of light through total darkness. Nevertheless, this gorgeous display is not as important as the mere fact that it holds and fascinates you. The height of ecstasy is the final sensation, in which you feel you are dying because of all this light and darkness. Especially weird is the fact that ecstasy wipes out surrounding objects, familiar forms of the world, until ail that is left is a monumental projection of shadow and light. It is hard to explain how this selection and purification takes place, why these immaterial shadows hold such sway over us. Demonism is inherent in any ecstatic exaltation. How can we help attributing an absolute character to light and darkness when they are all that is left of the world’s ecstasy? The frequency with which ecstasy occurs in Oriental religions, as well as in other forms of mysticism at all times, proves the rightness of our hypothesis. The absolute is inside oneself, not outside, and ecstasy, this paroxysm of interiority, reveals only inner shadows and glimmers of light. Next to them, the charm of light and day fades quickly. Ecstasy partakes of essence to such an extent that it gives an impression of metaphysical hallucination. Pure essences, grasped through ecstasy, are immaterial, but their immateriality causes vertigo and obsession from which you cannot free yourself except by converting them into metaphysical principles.

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Renunciation

So you witnessed old age, pain, and death and told yourself that pleasure is an illusion and that the pleasure seekers do not understand the inconstancy of things. Then you shunned the world, persuaded that nothing will endure. “I will not return,” you proclaimed, “before I have escaped birth, old age, and death.” There is much pride and suffering in every renunciation. Instead of retreating discreetly, without a big show of revolt and hatred, you denounce, emphatically and haughtily, others’ ignorance and illusions; you condemn their pleasures. The ascetics, who renounced life and fled into the desert, were convinced that they had overcome all human weaknesses. The belief that they had access to a subjective eternity gave them the illusion of total liberation. Nonetheless, their condemnation of pleasure and their contempt for humanity betray their inability to actually free themselves. Were I to withdraw into the most fearsome desert, renounce everything, and live in absolute solitude, still I would never dream of despising men and their pleasure. Since I cannot really enter eternity through renunciation and solitude, since I shall die like the rest, why despise them, why call my way the only true one? All the great prophets lack discretion and human understanding. I witness pain, old age, death, and I know that they cannot be overcome; but why should I spoil another’s enjoyment with my knowledge? Suffering and the consciousness of its inescapability lead to renunciation; yet nothing would induce me, not even if I were to become a leper, to condemn another’s joy. There is much envy in every act of condemnation. Buddhism and Christianity are the revenge and the spite of those who suffer.

Were I in the throes of agony, I would still praise and celebrate orgy. I do not recommend renunciation, because only a few can overcome the thought of life’s inconstancy. In society, as much as in the wilderness, inconstancy will preserve its bitter flavor. Just think how much greater were the illusions of great solitaries than those of the innocent and the naive!

The thought of renunciation is so bitter that it is hard to imagine how man ever came to conceive of it. He who in a moment of despair has not

experienced a cold shiver, a sensation of ineluctable abandonment, cosmic death, and individual nothingness, has not experienced the terrifying preliminaries of renunciation.

Renounce? But how? Where should you go in order not to renounce it all at once although that is the only genuine renunciation? Actual deserts are not readily available to us in our lands and our climate; we lack the adequate milieu. Not living under the fierce desert sun, with just that one thought about eternity, are we to become saints with roofs over our heads? Not to be able to renounce except through suicide is a strictly modern drama. Were our inner desert to materialize, wouldn't its immensity crush us? why not explode? Isn't there enough energy in me to shake the world, enough madness to do away with light? Isn't chaos my only joy, and isn't the elan which will cause my downfall my only pleasure? Are not my flights falls, and is not my explosion my love? Can I only love through self-destruction? Could it be that I am totally forbidden knowledge of the pure states? Can there be so much poison in my love? Have I not fought death long enough? Should Eros also be my enemy? Why is it that, when love is reborn in me, I become so afraid that I am ready to swallow the entire world in order to stop my love from growing? My predicament: I want to be disappointed in love so that I will have more reasons to suffer. Only love reveals to you your true degradation. Can the man who has looked death in the face still love? Can he still die of love?

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The Blessings of Insomnia

Just as ecstasy purifies you of the particular and the contingent, leaving nothing except light and darkness, so insomnia kills off the multiplicity and diversity of the world, leaving you prey to your private obsessions. What strangely enchanted tunes gush forth during those sleepless nights! Their flowing tones are bewitching, but there is a note of regret in this melodic surge which keeps it short of ecstasy. What kind of regret? It is hard to say, because insomnia is so complex that one cannot tell what the loss is. Or maybe the loss is infinite. During wakeful nights, the presence of a single thought, or feeling, reigns supreme. It becomes the source of the night's mysterious music. Thus transformed, the thoughts of wakeful nights are mild enough to stir depths of universal anxiety in man's soul. Death itself, although still hideous, acquires in the night a sort of impalpable transparency, an illusory and musical character. Nevertheless, the sadness of this universal night is like the sadness of Oriental music, in which the mystery of death is more dominant than that of love.

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On the Transubstantiation of Love

Irrationality presides over the birth of love. The sensation of melting is also present, for love is a form of intimate communion and nothing expresses it better than the subjective impression of melting, the falling away of all barriers of individuation. Isn't love specificity and universality all at once? True communion can only be achieved through an individual. I love someone, but since she is the symbol of everything, I partake of the essence of everything, unconsciously and naively. Love's universality presupposes the specificity of the object of love; the individual is a window on the universal. Exaltation in love arises from the growth of love's irrationality to a climax of intensity. All true love is a peak which sexuality cannot dwarf.

Sexuality too has its unique peaks. However, although one cannot conceive of love without sexuality, the strange phenomenon we call love displaces sexuality from the center of our consciousness. Obsessively purified, the beloved acquires an aura of both transcendence and intimacy which makes sexuality marginal, if not in fact, at least subjectively. There is no spiritual love between the sexes, only a transfiguration of the flesh through which the beloved identifies herself so much with her lover that she creates an illusion of spirituality. Only then does the sensation of melting occur: the flesh trembles in a supreme spasm, ceases resistance, burning with inner fires, melting and flowing, unstoppable lava.

Man, the Insomniac Animal

Whoever said that sleep is the equivalent of hope had a penetrating intuition of the frightening importance not only of sleep but also of insomnia! The importance of insomnia is so colossal that I am tempted to define man as the animal who cannot sleep. Why call him a rational animal when other animals are equally reasonable? But there is not another animal in the entire

creation that wants to sleep yet cannot. Sleep is forgetfulness: life's drama, its complications and obsessions vanish completely, and every awakening is a new beginning, a new hope. Life thus maintains a pleasant discontinuity, the illusion of permanent regeneration. Insomnia, on the other hand, gives birth to a feeling of irrevocable sadness, despair, and agony. The healthy man - the animal - only dabbles in insomnia: he knows nothing of those who would give a kingdom for an hour of unconscious sleep, those as terrified by the sight of a bed as they would be of a torture rack. There is a close link between insomnia and despair. The loss of hope comes with the loss of sleep. The difference between paradise and hell: you can always sleep in paradise, never in hell. God punished man by taking away sleep and giving him knowledge. Isn't deprivation of sleep one of the most cruel tortures practiced in prisons? Madmen suffer a lot from insomnia; hence their depressions, their disgust with life, and their suicidal impulses. Isn't the sensation, typical of wakeful hallucinations, of diving into an abyss, a form of madness? Those who commit suicide by throwing themselves from bridges into rivers or from high rooftops onto pavements must be motivated by a blind desire to fall and the dizzying attraction of abysmal depths.

My soul is chaos, how can it be at all? There is everything in me: search and you will find out. I am a fossil dating from the beginning of the world: not all of its elements have completely crystallized, and initial chaos still shows through. I am absolute contradiction, climax of antinomies, the last limit of tension; in me anything is possible, for I am he who at the supreme moment, in front of absolute nothingness, will laugh.

Truth, What a Word!

The idea of liberation through the suppression of desire is the greatest foolishness ever conceived by the human mind. Why cut life short, why destroy it for so little profit as total indifference and the illusion of freedom? How dare you speak of life after you have stifled it in yourself? I have more respect for the man with thwarted desires, unhappy and desperate in love, than for the cold and proud philosopher. A world full of

philosophers, what a terrifying prospect! They should be all wiped out so that life could go on naturally - blindly and irrationally.

I hate the wisdom of these men unmoved by truths, who do not suffer with their nerves, their flesh, and their blood. I like only vital, organic truths, the offspring of our anxiety. Those whose thoughts are alive are always right; there are no arguments against them. And even if there were, they would not last long. I wonder how there can still be men searching for the truth. Do wise men not yet understand that truth cannot be?

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The Beauty of Flames

The beauty of flames lies in their strange play, beyond all proportion and harmony. Their diaphanous flare symbolizes at once grace and tragedy, innocence and despair, sadness and voluptuousness. Their burning transparence has something of the lightness of great purifications. I wish the fiery transcendence would carry me up and throw me into a sea of flames, where, consumed by their delicate and insidious tongues, I would die an ecstatic death. The beauty of flames creates the illusion of a pure, sublime death similar to the light of dawn. Immaterial, death in flames is like a burning of light, graceful wings. Do only butterflies die in flames? What about those devoured by the flames within them?

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The Paucity of Wisdom

I hate wise men because they are lazy, cowardly, and prudent. To the philosophers' equanimity, which makes them indifferent to both pleasure and pain, I prefer devouring passions. The sage knows neither the tragedy of passion, nor the fear of death, nor risk and enthusiasm, nor barbaric, grotesque, or sublime heroism. He talks in proverbs and gives advice. He does not live, feel, desire, wait for anything. He levels down all the incongruities of life and then suffers the consequences. So much more complex is the man who suffers from limitless anxiety. The wise man's life is empty and sterile, for it is free from contradiction and despair. An existence full of irreconcilable contradictions is so much richer and creative. The wise man's resignation springs from inner void, not inner fire. I would rather die of fire than of void.

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The Return to Chaos

Let us return to original chaos! Let us imagine the primordial din, the original vortex! Let us throw ourselves into the whirlwind which has preceded the creation of form. Let our being tremble with effort and madness in the fiery abyss! Let everything be wiped out so that, surrounded by confusion and disequilibrium, we participate fully in the general delirium, retracing our way back from cosmos to chaos, from form to swirling gyres. The disintegration of the world is creation in reverse: an apocalypse upside down but sprung from similar impulses. Nobody desires to return to chaos without having first experienced an apocalyptic vertigo.

How great my terror and my joy at the thought of being dragged into the vortex of initial chaos, that pandemonium of paradoxical symmetry - the unique geometry of chaos, devoid of sense or form!

In every whirlwind hides a potential for form, just as in chaos there is a potential cosmos. Let me possess an infinite number of unrealized, potential forms! Let everything vibrate in me with the universal anxiety of the beginning, just awakening from nothingness!

I can only live at the beginning or the end of this world.

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Irony and SelfIrony

Once you've negated everything and done away completely with all forms of existence, once nothing can survive in the path of your negativity, who can you turn to, laughing or crying, if not your own self? Once you have witnessed the fall of the entire world, there is nothing left but for you to fall too. The infinite character of irony cancels all of life's contents. I'm not speaking here of elegant, refined irony, born of a sense of superficial pride and superiority - the irony some use to show off their detachment from the world - but of the tragic, bitter irony of despair. Genuine irony replaces tears, convulsions, or even a grotesque and criminal grin. There is a great difference between the irony of sufferers and that of lazy, superficial people. That of the former is the sign of a chronic inability to live innocently, connected with a sense of the loss of vital forces, whereas that of the latter knows nothing of this irrevocable loss and does not reflect it in consciousness. Irony betrays an inner convulsion, a deepening of wrinkles, the absence of spontaneous love, of human communion and understanding. It is a veiled contempt, despising naive, spontaneous gestures, because it is beyond the irrational and the naive. Nonetheless, this irony is envious of naive people. Enormously proud and therefore unable to show openly his admiration for simplicity, the ironic man, envious and poisonous, shrinks with spite. This bitter, tragic irony seems to me more genuine than lighthearted, skeptical irony. The fact that selfirony is always tragic and agonic is quite revealing. Selfirony is made up of sighs, not of smiles, even though its sighs are stifled. Selfirony is an expression of despair. You've lost the world; you've lost yourself. Henceforth a sinister, poisonous burst of laughter haunts your actions at every step, and above the ruins of smiling innocence rises the hideous ghost of an agonic grin, more contorted than those of primitive masks and more rigid than those on Egyptian statues.

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On Poverty

Persuaded that poverty is the human lot, I can no longer believe in any doctrine of reform. All such doctrines are equally stupid and futile. There is no poverty among animals, because they live on their own, ignorant of hierarchy and exploitation. This phenomenon is exclusively human, for man alone made his equals his slaves. Man alone is capable of so much self-contempt.

All the charitable endeavors in this world only manage to bring poverty into greater relief; they show it to be more terrible and unintelligible than utter dereliction. Poverty, like ruins, hurts by an absence of humanity and makes one regret that men are unwilling to change that which is well within their power to change. Knowing full well that men could abolish poverty, you are nevertheless aware of its eternity and you feel a bitter anxiety in which man appears in all his petty inconsequence. Poverty in social life is only a pale reflection of man's infinite inner poverty. Whenever I think of poverty, I lose my desire to live. I should throw away my pen and move into the slums, where I could relieve poverty better and more efficiently than with a poisonous book. Whenever I think of man's abject poverty, his rot, his spreading gangrene, I am gripped by mortal despair. Instead of constructing theories and ideologies to deal with poverty, man, this rational animal, should simply give the coat off his back in a gesture of fraternal understanding. Poverty in the world compromises man more than anything else and will no doubt bring about the downfall of such a megalomaniac animal. In front of poverty, I'm even ashamed of music. The essence of social life is injustice. How, then, should one support any social or political doctrine?

Poverty destroys everything in life; it makes it ghastly, disgusting. Alongside aristocratic paleness there is the paleness of poverty: the former, a consequence of refinement, the latter, of mummification, for poverty turns you into a ghost, makes shadows out of life, twilight creatures like survivors of a cosmic holocaust. The convulsions of poverty bear no trace of purification; they are all hatred, bitterness, and flesh gone evil. Poverty

does not engender a pure, angelic soul or an immaculate humility any more than sickness does; its humility is venomous, evil, and vengeful.

There cannot be a relative rebellion in the face of injustice. There can only be eternal rebellion, because human poverty is eternal.

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The Flight from the Cross

I do not like prophets any more than I like fanatics who have never doubted their mission. I measure prophets' value by their ability to doubt, the frequency of their moments of lucidity. Doubt makes them truly human, but their doubt is more impressive than that of ordinary people. Everything else in them is nothing but absolutism, preaching, moral didacticism. They want to teach others, bring them salvation, show them the truth, change their destinies, as if their truths were better than those of the others. Only doubt can distinguish prophets from maniacs. But isn't it too late for them to doubt? The one who thought he was the son of God only doubted at the last moment. Christ really doubted not on the mountain but on the cross. I am convinced that on the cross Jesus envied the destiny of anonymous men and, had he been able to, would have retreated to the most obscure corner of the world, where no one would have begged him for hope or salvation. I can imagine him alone with the Roman soldiers, imploring them to take him off the cross, pull out the nails, and let him escape to where the echo of human suffering would no longer reach him. Not because he would suddenly have ceased to believe in his mission - he was too enlightened to be a skeptic - but because death for others is harder to bear than one's own death. Jesus suffered crucifixion because he knew that his ideas could triumph only through his own sacrifice.

People say: for us to believe in you, you must renounce everything that is yours and also yourself. They want your death as a warranty for the authenticity of your beliefs. Why do they admire works written in blood? Because such works spare them any suffering while at the same time preserving the illusion of suffering. They want to see the blood and tears behind your lines. The crowd's admiration is sadistic.

Had Jesus not died on the cross, Christianity would not have triumphed. Mortals doubt everything except death. Christ's death was for them the ultimate proof of the validity of Christian principles. Jesus could have easily escaped crucifixion or could have given in to the Devil! He who has not made a pact with the Devil should not live, because the Devil

symbolizes life better than God. If I have any regrets, it is that the Devil has rarely tempted me … but then neither has God loved me. Christians have not yet understood that God is farther removed from them than they are from Him. I can very well imagine God being bored with men who only know how to beg, exasperated by the triviality of his creation, equally disgusted with both heaven and earth. And I see him taking flight into nothingness, like Jesus escaping from the cross…. What would have happened if the Roman soldiers had listened to Jesus' plea, had taken him off the cross and let him escape? He would certainly not have gone to some other part of the world to preach but only to die, alone, without people's sympathy and tears. And even supposing that, because of his pride, he did not beg for freedom, I find it difficult to believe that this thought did not obsess him. He must have truly believed that he was the son of God. His belief notwithstanding, he could not have helped doubting or being gripped by the fear of death at the moment of his supreme sacrifice. On the cross, Jesus had moments when, if he did not doubt that he was the son of God, he regretted it. He accepted death uniquely so that his ideas would triumph.

It may very well be that Jesus was simpler than I imagine him, that he had fewer doubts and fewer regrets, for he doubted his divine origin only at his death. We, on the other hand, have so many doubts and regrets that not one among us would dare dream that he is the son of a god. I hate Jesus for his preachings, his morality, his ideas, and his faith. I love him for his moments of doubt and regret, the only truly tragic ones in his life, though neither the most interesting nor the most painful, for if we had to judge from their suffering, how many before him would also be entitled to call themselves sons of God!

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The Cult of Infinity

I cannot speak of infinity without experiencing a double vertigo, both external and internal - as if, suddenly abandoning a wellordered existence, I threw myself into a whirlwind and began to move through space at the speed of thought. My trajectory tends toward an eternal and inaccessible point. The farther this point moves into inconceivable distance, the faster the giddy gyrations of the whirlwind. Neither bright nor graceful, they have the intricate pattern of cosmic flames. The world is shaking and trembling, spinning at an infernally maddening speed as if the apocalypse were approaching. One cannot grasp the meaning of infinity without experiencing this strange vertiginous feeling of the End. This is the paradox of infinity: it makes the sensation of the end more real while at the same time making it ever more impossible, for infinity, both in time and space, leads to nothing. How can we accomplish anything in the future when we have behind us an eternity in which nothing was accomplished? If the world had had any meaning, it would have been revealed to us by now and we would know it. How can I continue to believe that it will be disclosed in the future when it has not been made manifest yet? But the world has no meaning; irrational at the core, it is, moreover, infinite. Meaning is conceivable only in a finite world, where one can reach something, where there are limits to stop our regression, clear points of reference, where history moves toward a goal envisioned by the theory of progress. Infinity leads to nothing, for it is totally provisional. “Everything” is too little when compared to infinity. Nobody can have the experience of infinity without spells of dizziness, a profound and unforgettable anxiety. How can one help being anxious when all is equally infinite?

Infinity renders impossible any solution to the problem of meaning. It gives me demonic pleasure to think that the world lacks meaning because of infinity. What’s the use of “meaning,” after all? Can’t we live without it? Universal meaninglessness gives way to ecstatic inebriation, an orgy of irrationality. Since the world has no meaning, let us live! Without definite aims or accessible ideals, let us throw ourselves into the roaring whirlwind of infinity, follow its tortuous path in space, burn in its flames, love its

cosmic madness and total anarchy! One must bear within oneself the germs of this cosmic anarchy in order to grasp its meaning. To live infinity, as well as to meditate a long time upon it, is the most terrifying lesson in anarchy and revolt one can ever learn. Infinity shakes you to the roots of your being, disorganizes you, but it also makes you forget the petty, the contingent, and the insignificant.

How fortunate that, having lost all our hopes, we can still leap into infinity, dive into boundlessness, participate in the universal anarchy of its whirlwind! What happiness to be carried away by the madness of this incessant movement and to think less of our death than of our insanity, to fulfill a dream of cosmic barbarity and boundless exaltation! Let our falling out of this whirlwind not mean gradual extinction, but sustain our agony in the chaos of the original maelstrom. Let the pathos and drama of infinity come to us once more in the loneliness of death so that our passing away into nothingness will resemble an illumination amplifying the mystery and the meaninglessness of this world.

One of the principal elements of infinity is its negation of form. Absolute becoming, infinity destroys anything that is formed, crystallized, or finished. Isn’t music the art which best expresses infinity because it dissolves all forms into a charmingly ineffable fluidity? Form always tends to complete what is fragmentary and, by individualizing its contents, to eliminate the perspective of the universal and the infinite; thus it exists only to remove the content of life from chaos and anarchy. Forms are illusory and, beyond their evanescence, true reality reveals itself as an intense pulsation. The penchant for form comes from love of finitude, the seduction of boundaries which will never engender metaphysical revelations. Metaphysics, like music, springs from the experience of infinity. They both grow on heights and cause vertigo. I have always wondered why those who have produced masterpieces in these domains have not all gone mad. Music more than any other art requires so much concentration that one could easily, after creative moments, lose one’s mind. All great composers ought to either commit suicide or become insane at the height of their creative powers. Are not all those aspiring to infinity on the road to madness? Normality, abnormality, are notions that no longer mean anything. Let us

live in the ecstasy of infinity, let us love that which is boundless, let us destroy forms and institute the only cult without forms: the cult of infinity.

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Transfiguration of Banality

Since I will not die right away, nor regain my innocence, going through the same routine motions every day is sheer madness. Banality must be overcome at all costs and the way cleared for transfiguration. How sad to see men bypass themselves, neglect their own destiny instead of rekindling the light they carry within them or getting drunk on their abysmal darkness! Why not wrench from suffering all that it can yield, why not tend a smile until we have reached all the way back to its vital springs? We all have hands, yet no one thinks of using them to convey absolute expression through their delicate movements. We admire hands in paintings, we love to talk about their meaning, but if they must express our own inner tragedy, they remain stiff and awkward. To have a spectral hand, transparent like an immaterial reflection, nervous, tense as if in a final spasm…! Or, if not, then a heavy, threatening hand, cruel and hard! Hands should tell us more than words or sighs, a smile or a prayer. The gift of absolute expression, offspring of continuous transfiguration, will transform us into a center of light more powerful than the sun itself if not only our hands but also our face and everything else that is stamped with our individuality will participate in it. The presence of some people means for others overexcitement, lassitude, or illumination. Such people know neither void nor discontinuity, but only the communion through which heights become equally pleasurable and vertiginous.

I feel in me a strange restlessness, growing and dilating like a regret, taking roots like sadness. Is it fear of my problematic future, or is it fear of my own anxiety? I am overcome by anxiety about my own fatality. Could I go on living with these obsessions? Is all of this life or an absurd dream? In me is wrought the grotesque fantasy of a demon. The demonic character of this world is concentrated in my anxiety - a mingling of regrets, twilight dreams, sadness, and unreality. It will not be the perfume of flowers that I scatter on the earth, but smoke and dust as after a great cataclysm!

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The Burden of Sadness

Is there another sadness besides that of death? Definitely not, because true sadness is black, devoid of charms, and dreamless. There is greater weariness in sadness than in melancholy, and it drives one to disgust with life, to acute depression. The difference between sadness and pain: the former is dominated by reflexivity while the latter is weighed down by the fatal materiality of sensation. They both lead only to death, never to love or erotic exaltation. Eros means unmediated living in the secret necessity of life which - given the essential innocence of any erotic experience - creates the illusion of liberty. To be sad or suffering, on the other hand, means to be incapable of participating directly and organically in the flux of life. Sadness as well as suffering reveals existence for us, for only through them do we acquire consciousness of our separation from the objective world, that anxiety which confers a tragic character upon our existence.

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Degradation through Work

Men generally work too much to be themselves. Work is a curse which man has turned into pleasure. To work for work's sake, to enjoy a fruitless endeavor, to imagine that you can fulfill yourself through assiduous labor - all that is disgusting and incomprehensible. Permanent and uninterrupted work dulls, trivializes, and depersonalizes. Work displaces man's center of interest from the subjective to the objective realm of things. In consequence, man no longer takes an interest in his own destiny but focuses on facts and things. What should be an activity of permanent transfiguration becomes a means of exteriorization, of abandoning one's inner self. In the modern world, work signifies a purely external activity; man no longer makes himself through it, he makes things. That each of us must have a career, must enter upon a certain form of life which probably does not suit us, illustrates work's tendency to dull the spirit. Man sees work as beneficial to his being, but his fervor reveals his penchant for evil. In work, man forgets himself; yet his forgetfulness is not simple and naive, but rather akin to stupidity. Through work, man has moved from subject to object; in other words, he has become a deficient animal who has betrayed his origins. Instead of living for himself - not selfishly but growing spiritually - man has become the wretched, impotent slave of external reality. Where have they all gone; ecstasy, vision, exaltation? Where is the supreme madness or the genuine pleasure of evil? The negative pleasure one finds in work partakes of the poverty and banality of daily life, its pettiness. Why not abandon this futile work and begin anew without repeating the same wasteful mistake? Is subjective consciousness of eternity not enough? It is the feeling for eternity that the frenetic activity and trepidation of work has destroyed in us. Work is the negation of eternity. The more goods we acquire in the temporal realm, the more intense our external work, the less accessible and farther removed is eternity. Hence the limited perspective of active and energetic people, the banality of their thought and actions. I am not contrasting work to either passive contemplation or vague dreaminess, but to an unrealizable transfiguration; nevertheless, I prefer an intelligent and observant laziness to intolerable, terrorizing activity. To awaken the modern world, one must

praise laziness. The lazy man has an infinitely keener perception of metaphysical reality than the active one.

I am lured by faraway distances, the immense void I project upon the world. A feeling of emptiness grows in me; it infiltrates my body like a light and impalpable fluid. In its progress, like a dilation into infinity, I perceive the mysterious presence of the most contradictory feelings ever to inhabit a human soul. I am simultaneously happy and unhappy, exalted and depressed, overcome by both pleasure and despair in the most contradictory harmonies. I am so cheerful and yet so sad that my tears reflect at once both heaven and earth. If only for the joy of my sadness, I wish there were no death on this earth.

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The Sense of Endings

I can only speak about the sadness and the joy of the end. I love only what reveals itself without reserve or compromise; you will never find it anywhere but in the convulsions of heart-rending sadness, the inebriation and excitement of last moments. Is not everything final? What is the anxiety of nothingness if not the perverse joy of our final sadness, our exalted love for the eternity of nothingness and the transience of existence? Can it really be that for us existence means exile, and nothingness, home?

I must struggle against myself, fly into a rage at my destiny, blow up all resistance to my transfiguration; let there be only my desire for light and darkness! Let each one of my actions be either triumph or fall, flight or failure! Let life grow and die in me with the speed of a lightning bolt! Let not the pettiness and rationality of commonplace existence spoil the pleasures and torments of my inner chaos, the tragic delights of my final despair and joy!

To survive moments of extreme organic tension is not a merit but a mark of imbecility. Survive, only to return to the banality of existence? Survival is equally meaningless after the experience of nothingness and after the paroxysm of sexual pleasure. I can't understand why people do not commit suicide during orgasm, why they don't think survival commonplace and vulgar. Such an intense though brief quiver should reduce us to ashes in seconds. But if it does not kill us, we should kill ourselves…. There are so many kinds of death. Yet no one has the courage or the originality to attempt sexual suicide, a death no less absolute than the others but in which the passage into nothingness is made from heights of pleasure. Why not take this path? A flash of bitter lucidity in the forgetfulness of sexual pleasure would suffice for sexual death no longer to appear as mere illusion.

When men can no longer bear the monotony and the banality of ordinary existence, they will find in each experience of the absolute an opportunity to commit suicide. The impossibility of surviving such extraordinary states of exaltation will destroy existence. No one will then doubt that it is

possible to long for death after having listened to certain symphonies or admired a unique landscape.

Animal banished from life, man’s condition is tragic, for he no longer finds fulfillment in life’s simple values. For animals, life is all there is; for man, life is a question mark. An irreversible question mark, for man has never found, nor will ever find, any answers. Life not only has no meaning; it can never have one.

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The Satanic Principle of Suffering

If there are happy people on this earth, why don't they come out and shout with joy, proclaim their happiness in the streets? Why so much discretion and restraint? If I were exuding permanent joy, serenity, and contentment, I would not hold it all inside me. I would generously share it with others. I would let myself be swept away by the buoyant energy that animates me.

If there is happiness, then it must be shared and communicated. But maybe truly happy people are not aware of their happiness. Then we could lend them some of our consciousness in exchange for part of their infinite unconsciousness. Why is suffering all tears and screams, and pleasure, all quivers? Were man as conscious of his pleasures as he is of his pains, he would not have to redeem the former. Wouldn't the distribution of joy and sorrow in the world be more equitable then?

If pain is not easily forgotten, it is precisely because it occupies an important place in consciousness. The only people who must forget a lot are those who have suffered a lot. Normal people are the only ones with nothing to forget.

While pains have character, pleasures vanish, melting away like forms with indistinct contours. It is hard to remember pleasure and the circumstances surrounding it, while the memory of pain is poignant and that of its circumstances makes it even more so. Pleasure cannot be totally forgotten - the man of pleasure in his old age will be only slightly disabused while the sufferer will, at best, arrive at bitter resignation. To assert that pleasures are selfish and cut man off from life is as shameful a prejudice as the one which asserts that pains bring us closer to it. The frivolity of such prejudices is revolting. Their bookish origin indicts all libraries and proves the value of real experience carried out to the end.

The Christian conception of suffering as a path to love, if not its main gate, is fundamentally false. But isn't Christianity mistaken on more than just this point? To speak of suffering as the path to love means to know nothing of

suffering's satanic essence. You don't climb up the steps of suffering; you climb down. They do not lead to heaven but to hell. The darkness at the bottom of the ladder of suffering is less eternal or infinite than the blinding light at the top of the ladder of joy.

Suffering separates and dissociates; like a centrifugal force it pulls you away from the center of life, the hub of the universe where all things tend toward unity. The divine principle distinguishes itself by an effort toward cosmic synthesis and participation in the essence of everything. The satanic principle, on the other hand, is a principle of dislocation and duality which characterizes all suffering.

Through joy, spiritual or sensual, you naively partake of life; unconsciously you join in the dynamism of existence, each particle of your body vibrating with the irrational pulsations of the Whole.

Disjunction from the world through suffering leads to excessive interiorization and, paradoxically, to such a high level of consciousness that the world, with all its splendors and glooms, becomes exterior and transcendent. Thus deeply sundered from the world, so irredeemably lonely, how can we forget anything? We want to forget only what made us suffer. However, through some cruel and paradoxical twist, memories vanish when we want to remember but fix themselves permanently in the mind when we want to forget.

Men generally belong to two categories: those for whom the world offers opportunities for interiorization and those for whom the world remains external and objective. For true interiorization, objective existence is only a pretext. Only as such can it have any meaning at all, because an objective teleology cannot be elaborated and justified without a number of illusions, whose main defect is that they can easily be detected by a penetrating eye. All men see fires, storms, explosions, or landscapes; but how many feel the flames, the lightnings, the whirlwinds, or the harmony? How many have an inner beauty that tinges their melancholy? For the indifferent, to whom nature offers an insipid and cold objectivity, life even when fully enjoyed is a sum of missed opportunities.

However painful my agony, however great my isolation, the distance separating me from the world does nothing but render it more accessible. Although I cannot find in it either objective meaning or transcendental finality, existence, with its multiplicity of forms, has never ceased to be a source of both delight and sadness. At times, the beauty of a flower is enough to justify in my eyes the principle of universal finality while at others, the smallest cloud troubling the serenity of the sky rekindles my somber pessimism. Those who interiorize excessively discover symbolic meanings in the most insignificant aspects of nature.

Is it possible that I carry within me all that I've seen in my life? It is frightening to think that all those landscapes, books, horrors, and sublimities could be amassed in one single brain. I feel as if they have been transferred into me as realities and that they weigh heavily upon me. Sometimes I am overcome and I would prefer to forget all. Interiorization leads to inner collapse, because the world penetrates you and crushes you with its overbearing weight. Is it surprising, then, that some would have recourse to anything - from vulgarity to art - in order to forget?

I have no ideas, only obsessions. Anybody can have ideas. Ideas have never caused anybody's downfall.

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An Indirect Animal

All men have the same defect: they wait to live, for they have not the courage of each instant. Why not invest enough passion in each moment to make it an eternity? We all learn to live only when we no longer have anything to expect, because we do not live in the living present but in a vague and distant future. We should not wait for anything except the immediate promptings of the moment. We should wait without the consciousness of time. There’s no salvation without the immediate. But man is a being who no longer knows the immediate. He is an indirect animal.

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Impossible Truth

When should our happiness begin? When we have persuaded ourselves that there is no truth. All salvation comes thenceforth, even salvation through nothing. He who does not believe in the impossibility of truth, or does not rejoice in it, has only one road to salvation, which he will, however, never find.

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Subjectivity

For those deprived of faith, an excess of subjectivity leads either to megalomania or self-denigration, to too much love or too much self-hatred. Either way, you spend yourself ahead of time. Subjectivity makes you either God or Satan.

Homo …

Man should stop being - or becoming - a rational animal. He should become a lunatic, risking everything for the sake of his dangerous fantasies, capable of exaltations, ready to die for all that the world has as well as for what it has not. Each man’s ideal should be to stop being a man. This can only be attained through absolute arbitrariness.

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Love in Brief

Love of mankind springing from suffering resembles wisdom sprung from misfortune. In both cases, the roots are rotten and the sources poisoned. Only spontaneous love flowing with sincere generosity and self-abnegation can fertilize the soul of others. Love born in suffering hides too many tears and sighs not to have its rays stained by a bitter clarity. There is too much torment, renunciation, and anxiety in this love for it to be anything but infinite forbearance. You forgive everything, you accept everything, you justify everything. But is this still love? How can one love when one is removed from everything? This kind of love reveals the void of a soul suspended between all and nothing just as becoming a Don Juan is the only remedy for a broken heart. As for Christianity, it knows no love: it only knows forbearance or compassion, allusions to love rather than love itself.

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Nothing Matters

Everything is possible, and yet nothing is. All is permitted, and yet again, nothing. No matter which way we go, it is no better than any other. It is all the same whether you achieve something or not, have faith or not, just as it is all the same whether you cry or remain silent. There is an explanation for everything, and yet there is none. Everything is both real and unreal, normal and absurd, splendid and insipid. There is nothing worth more than anything else, nor any idea better than any other. Why grow sad from one's sadness and delight in one's joy? What does it matter whether our tears come from pleasure or pain? Love your unhappiness and hate your happiness, mix everything up, scramble it all! Be a snowflake dancing in the air, a flower floating downstream! Have courage when you don't need to, and be a coward when you must be brave! Who knows? You may still be a winner! And if you lose, does it really matter? Is there anything to win in this world? All gain is a loss, and all loss is a gain. Why always expect a definite stance, clear ideas, meaningful words? I feel as if I should spout fire in response to all the questions which were ever put, or not put, to me.

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The Sources of Evil

How can we fight unhappiness? By struggling with ourselves, for unhappiness comes from within, not from without. If we could constantly remind ourselves that everything is nothing but a reflection in our consciousness, more or less sharp, depending on the acuity of our senses, we could then attain a state of lucidity in which reality would resume its true proportions. We cannot aspire to happiness, only to less unhappiness.

To live in despair is a mark of great endurance, whereas to grow dull and stupid after a great unhappiness is a mark of deficiency. Self-control and sustained inner effort are required in order to diminish unhappiness. All efforts to attain happiness, on the other hand, are entirely futile. You cannot retrace your steps once you've taken the path to unhappiness; it is the path of no return. From being happy, one can become unhappy, so there are more unpleasant surprises in happiness than in unhappiness. The world seems right to us when we are happy; when unhappy, we wish the world were anything but what it is. Though fully aware that the source of unhappiness is in us, we nevertheless turn a personal defect into a metaphysical deficiency.

Unhappiness will never be sufficiently generous to acknowledge its own darkness in the world. Substituting for our subjective plight an objective one, we hope to lighten our burden and avoid the reproaches which we should in fact address to ourselves. But such objectification actually deepens our unhappiness and, presenting it as cosmic fatality, shuts off any possibility of lessening it or of making it more bearable.

The discipline of unhappiness causes less anxiety and fewer painful surprises; it abates agony and confines suffering. It is a disguise for an inner drama, the discreet mask of agony. Beauty's Magic Tricks

Man's sensitivity to beauty grows as he gets closer to happiness. In beauty, all things find their justification, their raison d'être. We conceive a beautiful thing such as it is. A painting or a landscape delights us to such an extent

that we can not imagine them in any other way but what they are. To place the world under the sign of beauty is to assert that it is as it should be. Then all is glorious harmony, and even the negative aspects of existence do nothing but increase its glory and its charm. Beauty will not bring us salvation, but it will bring us closer to happiness. In a world of antinomies, can beauty be spared? Its specific nature and attraction lie in the fact that it is paradoxical only from an objective point of view. The esthetic expresses this paradox: to represent the absolute through form, to give infinity objective, finite shape. The absolutein-the-form, that is, embodied in limited expressions, reveals itself only to him who is overcome by esthetic emotion; from any other point of view it is a contradictio in adjecto. For this reason, there is an incalculable amount of illusion in any ideal of beauty. But even worse is the fact that the fundamental premise of any ideal beauty - that the world is the way it should be - does not hold up under investigation. The world could be any way except the way it is.

Man’s Inconsistency

Why do men insist on achieving something? Would it not be better if they stood still under the sun in calm and silent immobility? What is there to accomplish? Why so much effort and ambition? Man has forgotten the meaning of silence. Although consciousness is the offspring of a vital deficiency, it is not a cause for inadaptability in every individual; in some it has, on the contrary, produced an exacerbation of their vital instincts. Unable to live in the present, man amasses things which weigh and subjugate him; the feeling of the future is a calamity to him. Consciousness has divided men into two categories, equally unbalanced and unhappy: those bent on interiorization, self-torment, and tragedy, and those possessed by the imperialistic urger to acquire and to own. Consciousness made animal, man, and man, demon, but it has never made anyone God, no matter how proud the world is to have killed one on the cross.

Shun men impervious to vice, for their insipidity is tiresome. For what would their conversation be about if not morality? Whoever has not

ventured beyond morality has not fully explored life’s opportunities and has never transfigured his sins. Genuine existence begins where morality ends; only after that can it experiment with everything, risk everything, even if obstacles block the road to achievement. Only through innumerable transfigurations can one reach the region where all is permitted, where the soul can fling itself without remorse into vulgarity, sublimity, or grotesqueness to such an extent that no direction or form of life remains unexplored. The tyranny governing ordinary existence vanishes and is replaced by the absolute spontaneity of unique existence, which carries its own law in itself. Could morality still serve such a being - probably the most generous because also the most absurd, capable of renouncing the whole world, and consequently giving away all that can be given? Generosity is incompatible with morality, that rationalization of customs, that mechanization of life. Any generous act is absurd, a renunciation unheard of in the ordinary man, who drapes himself in morality in order to hide his vulgar nullity. All that is truly moral begins when we have done with morality. The pettiness of its laws is never more evident than in its condemnation of vice, the expression of carnal tragedy born from the presence of the spirit in the flesh. Vice is the tragedy of the flesh, the flesh bursting out of its own fatality, attempting to break the shackles imprisoning its passionate impulses. An organic weariness drives the nerves and the flesh to a despair that only an exploration of all forms of pleasure can alleviate. In vice, the attraction of the abnormal creates a troubling anxiety: the spirit seems to have become blood and stirs in the flesh like an immanent force. Exploration of the possible cannot take place without the participation of the spirit. Vice is the triumph of the individual; how could flesh represent the individual without outside intervention? The mingling of flesh and spirit, blood and consciousness, creates an extremely rich effervescence for the man ensnared by vice. Nothing is worse than vice which is learned, aped, or borrowed; thus a rational extenuation of vice is unjustified: at best, one must single out its fecundity for those who know how to transfigure it, who can deviate its deviation. To practice it in criminal and vulgar ways is to exploit its scandalous materiality and ignore the immaterial frisson which constitutes its excellence. To attain certain heights, intimacy cannot dispense with the anxieties of vice. No man of vice can be condemned unless he ceases to look upon vice as a pretext and turns it into a goal.

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Capitulation

How does one become a pessimist? An organic fatality, rising from deep inner turmoil and without any external stimulus, causes incessant depressions which stifle the elan, attacking life at its roots. It is wrong to surmise that a pessimist has an organic deficiency or weak vital instincts. In fact, none but those who love life passionately, though maybe unconsciously, become pessimists. The devitalizing process takes place later, as a consequence of depressions, for only in passionate, visionary men do depressions have such capacity for erosion that they devour life as waves swallow up the shore. In the weak man, depressions cause neither tension, crises, nor excess; they lead to apathy and slow death. The pessimist represents an organic paradox whose insurmountable contradictions generate an intense effervescence. Is not this combination of frequent depressions with equally frequent elans a paradoxical situation? It goes without saying that depressions weaken and exhaust vitality, for depressions are assaults on life. There is no efficient way to fight them: they can subside temporarily through intense work and amusements. Only one endowed with restless vitality is susceptible to pessimism. You become a pessimist - a demonic, elemental, bestial pessimist - only when life has been defeated many times in its fight against depression. Then destiny emerges in man’s consciousness as a form of the irreparable.

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Facing Silence

Once you have come to set great store by silence, you have hit upon a fundamental expression of life in the margins. The reverence for silence of great solitaries and founders of religions has far deeper roots than we think. Men’s presence must have been unendurable and their complex problems disgusting for one not to care about anything except silence.

Chronic fatigue predisposes to a love of silence, for in it words lose their meaning and strike the ear with the hollow sonority of mechanical hammers; concepts weaken, expressions lose their force, the word grows barren as the wilderness. The ebb and flow of the outside is like a distant monotonous murmur unable to stir interest or curiosity. Then you will think it useless to express an opinion, to take a stand, to make an impression; the noises you have renounced increase the anxiety of your soul. After having struggled madly to solve all problems, after having suffered on the heights of despair, in the supreme hour of revelation, you will find that the only answer, the only reality, is silence.

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The Double and His Art

One does not learn the art of psychology, one lives and experiences it, for no science will give you the key to the mysteries of the soul. One cannot become a good psychologist without turning oneself into an object of study, evincing daily interest in the complexity of one's own case. To be initiated into the mysteries of the Other, you must first be initiated into your own. In order to be a psychologist, you must be sufficiently unhappy to understand happiness, so refined that you could become a barbarian at any moment, and so intensely desperate that you do not know whether you live in a desert or in the midst of a fire. Protean, equally centripetal and centrifugal, your ecstasy will have to be esthetic, sexual, religious, and perverse.

Fine psychological understanding is the product of a life of self-contemplation, a life which sees itself in other lives as if in so many mirrors; for a psychologist, all men are fragments of himself. The psychologist's contempt for others contains a grain of secret and unlimited selfirony. No one practices psychology out of love: it is rather a form of sadism, a desire to annihilate the other by taking possession of his intimate being, by stripping him of his mysterious aura. Quickly exhausting men and their limited resources, the psychologist is easily bored, for he is not naive enough to have friends and is too self-conscious to have lovers. Skepticism is not the beginning but the natural end of psychology. It is nature's punishment for this violator of mysteries, this supremely indiscreet person who, having invested too few illusions in knowledge, ends in disillusion.

A little knowledge is delightful; a lot, disgusting. The more you know, the less you want to know. He who has not suffered from knowledge has never known anything.

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Nonsense

When the ticking of a watch breaks the silence of eternity, arousing you out of serene contemplation, how can you help resenting the absurdity of time, its march into the future, and all the nonsense about evolution and progress? Why go forward, why live in time? The sudden revelation of time at such moments, conferring upon it a crushing preeminence otherwise nonexistent, is the fruit of a strong contempt for life, an unwillingness to go on. If this revelation happens at night, the sensation of unutterable loneliness is added to the absurdity of time, because then, far from the crowd, you face time alone, the two of you caught in an irreducible duality. Time, in this nocturnal desolation, is no longer populated with actions and objects: it becomes an evergrowing nothingness, a dilating void, a threat from beyond. Silence resounds then with the mournful clamor of bells knelling for a dead universe. Only he who has separated time from existence lives this drama: fleeing the latter, he is crushed by the former. And he feels how time, like death, gains ground.

E. M. Cioran: A Short Chronology

1911 - E. M. Cioran is born April 8 in Rasinari, near the city of Sibiu in Southern Transylvania, then still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. His father is a Romanian Orthodox priest.

1920-28 - He attends high school in Sibiu.

1929-31 - He studies philosophy at the University of Bucharest, where he writes a thesis on Henri Bergson.

1934 - On the Heights of Despair, his first book, is published in Bucharest by the King Carol II Foundation for Art and Literature. It is awarded the

foundation’s prestigious prize for young authors.

1936 - He earns his Teaching Certificate in philosophy. Cartea amgirilor (The Book of Delusions).

1937 - &n

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